The Referencing
of
'Stringed Things' of Belief
by
Contemporary Artists

by

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Keywords:
string, beads, belief, in-betweeness, hybridity, contemporary art

Abstract

The Referencing of 'Stringed Things' of Belief by Contemporary Artists

The purpose of this study has been to examine how contemporary artists reference traditional 'stringed things' of belief. The term 'stringed things' includes traditional objects such as prayer strands, armbands, necklaces and contemporary works constructed of natural and synthetic materials. Belief encompasses religious and cosmological world views. The emphasis is on art of the Pacific Rim in order to limit the parameters for a study of this nature. This is the region in which the researcher is based, and as such, the artists and their work were more easily accessible.

Traditionally, string was a metaphor for 'connectedness', reflecting the ties that bound a community together. In the contemporary context, it has become a way of expressing links and negotiations of identity across cultures. The strongest defining characteristic of contemporary references to 'stringed things' of belief is 'in-betweeness', a dynamic condition where interplay occurs. In-betweeness resonates throughout. Identity for some contemporary artists is complex and this complexity is reflected in the struggle to define it. Many find themselves in-between cultures and histories; many of the forms are cross-overs between art and craft. The gallery is a powerful agent in cross-cultural negotiation and provides the stage where artists navigate their positions.

This thesis begins with a comparative examination of traditional 'stringed things', identifying recurring themes, which in turn, provides a lens through which to examine contemporary art that references these objects. A crucial finding of this thesis was that contemporary art response is strongly motivated by the difficulties associated with the study of traditional 'stringed things', such as inaccessibility, historical bias, loss and silence. Contemporary artists reference 'stringed things' as aesthetic forms and as carriers of meaning.

Artists' responses reflect entangled histories and range from the extension of original and devotional meanings, the mourning of the loss of earlier belief systems, the critique of established religions, and the challenge of traditional stereotypes, while at the same time, developing new perspectives. Many of the contemporary artists, who reference traditional 'stringed things', are of indigenous or mixed race heritage. No contemporary responses to 'stringed things' were found from Hindu, Islamic and Jewish traditions.

Artists, whose selected work is examined in this thesis, include Australian based artists: Lola Greeno, Julie Gough, Jonathan Jones and Ian Bonde; New Zealand based artists: Niki Hastings-McFall, Sofia Tekela-Smith, and Maureen Lander; Chinese artist Chen Zhen and Thai artist Montien Boonma.

This study found that there is a vivacious and optimistic engagement by artists, with reference to traditional 'stringed things', to comment on identity, belief systems and colonial heritage. These artists explore the interface between different cultures through the use of old and new technologies. Their work is about new encoded meanings, about celebrating opportunities for discourse and about creating new parameters. They illustrate that enriched exchanges are possible across cultures.

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The opportunity to interview members of different belief systems, who elucidated the meaning of 'stringed things' from a believer's perspective, was highly valued. They include: Jamyang and Uli Gurung, David and Pnina Clark, and Murshid F. A. Ali Elsenossi. I am also grateful to artists who shared the meaning of the 'stringed things' in their practice in terms of source, concept and structure. They include: Ajak Mabia, Lola Greeno, Niki Hastings-McFall, Sofia Tekela-Smith, Christopher Braddock and Julie Gough.

I am appreciative of the collegial support from many gallery/museum curators and university researchers who generously responded to my enquiries, particularly in the early period of my research when I was refining the focus of the study. They are listed in Appendix I: Contact List.

In particular I would like to acknowledge Deborah Zinn, from beadswebsite, for her contacts and interest in my research; Irene Macquire, from Fullers Bookshop, for sourcing references and the loan of her copies of the publication *Ornament*, and Eve Hicks, for the transcription of the interviews.

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Introduction

Purpose, Parameters, Context, Significance and Methodology

This study examines how contemporary artists draw on the spiritual and the ritual, with specific reference to traditional 'stringed things' associated with religious and cosmological belief systems. The term, 'stringed things', has been chosen because it is encompassing and broad in meaning. It satisfactorily describes a range of traditional objects and artefacts, such as prayer strands, armbands, necklaces, string on its own or with feather, shell and tooth attachments, and a range of contemporary art works constructed of a variety of materials, natural and synthetic.

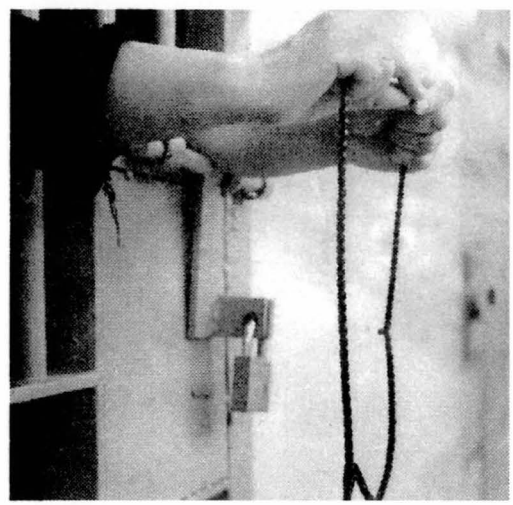

Figure 1: Newspaper image of refugee praying[1]

In the current world climate, the image of the interred refugee praying with his Islamic prayer strand is powerful; it represents a conviction of belief and strength of identity (Figure 1). This image seeded my interest in 'stringed things' and raised the basic question of this study: "How were contemporary artists referencing these and other powerful belief symbols?"

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1 "Making 'Mess' of Iraq," *The Saturday Mercury* 22 May 2004, pp.7-9.

Encompassing concepts relating to spirituality, religious belief systems, and cosmological world views are of great interest to artists. Susan Sontag says: "Every era has to reinvent the project of 'spirituality' for itself...and in the modern era, one of the most active metaphors for the spiritual project is art."[2] There are many examples of contemporary art, in varying mediums, that reference sacred dimensions from different religious and belief systems, such as, *Praying Hand Protector I* by Rosemary O'Rourke (birthdate unknown, Australian), *Jagamarra Manjushri* by Tim Johnson (b. 1947, Australian and English heritage) and Michael Nelson (b. 1946-49, Australian Aboriginal), and *No Up, No Down, I am 10,000 Things* by Lindy Lee (b. 1954, Australian of Chinese heritage) (Figures 2-4). O'Rourke's work conveys feelings of childhood religious wonder from her Catholic upbringing. Johnson, a Buddhist, and Nelson, an Australian Aboriginal, collaborate to synthesise different cultural forms, processes and ways of viewing the world. Lee, a Buddhist, surrenders to outside forces in making splats and explores how the multi-dimensional world is activated within.[3]

Figure 2: Rosemary O'Rouke *Praying Hand Protector I* 2004[4]
Stitched organza; dimensions unknown

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2 Sontag, S., *A Susan Sontag Reader* Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 1982, p. 181.

3 Michael, L., *Three Views of Emptiness; Buddhism and the Art of Tim Johnson, Lindy Lee and Peter Tyndall* Monash University Museum of Art, Monash, 2001, pp. 7-9.

4 Illustration in http://www.tourismwaggawagga.com.au/tww/?tww=events&cat=events_broadart&article 24 Dec 2005, A Tamworth City Gallery Travelling Exhibition, 2005.

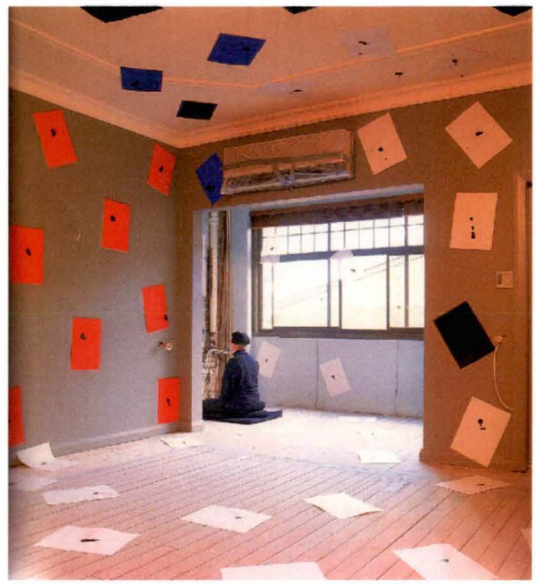

Figure 3 (left): Tim Johnson and Michael Nelson *Jagamarra Manjushri* 1999[5]
Oil on canvas; dimensions unknown
Figure 4 (right): Lindy Lee *No Up, No Down, I am 10,000 Things* 1995[6]
Installation, Project Art Space, Art Gallery of New South Wales

The search for spirituality often looks to the 'primitive' for metaphors and for energy of expression. Jonathan Jones, art critic, states that "Modern art is aggressively secular, yet has repeatedly drawn energy from the imaginative kingdoms of religion and ritual."[7] In his article, Jones comments specifically about the derivation of Prince Harry's paintings from Australian Aboriginal dot paintings. He also raises broader concerns about the cross-cultural influences on the arts, the attraction to the 'primitive'[8], and the fine line that must be

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5 Michael, L. 2001, op cit, p. 28.

6 Michael, L. 2001, op cit, p. 33.

7 Jones, J., *Jonathan Jones: Aborigines Are Wrong About Harry*, 2004, Guardian Newspapers Limited, Available: http://www.buzzle.com/editorials/8-20-2003-44421.asp?viewPage=2, 24 Oct 2004.

8 The debate about the appropriateness of the word 'primitive' continues and remains unresolved. Lippard says that the term is pervasive and insidious and could be replaced by 'ethnic art' but acknowledges that this new term is also limiting (Lippard, L. "Naming 1990" *Primitivism and the Twentieth-Century Art a Documentary History* Eds, Flam, J. and Deutch, M. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2003). Flam and Deutch distinguish between 'Primitive' and 'primitivism'; 'primitivism' being a cultural concept, and 'Primitive' being a historical meaning, useful for its brevity and conciseness despite being burdened with negative connotations. They regard the current French terminology, *Arts Premiers* (Primal Arts) or *Arts Primordiaux* (Primordial Arts) as misnomers, which revive the evolutionary arguments that such art is part of the 'childhood' of humankind. These discourses remain in flux. Primitivism and Primitive art have become loaded terms, tainted with racism and a number of cultural issues, such as appropriation and exploitation (Flam, J., and Deutch, M., eds, *Primitivism and the Twentieth-Century Art a Documentary History*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, Ltd, 2003, pp. xiv, 1.). In this study, Flam and Deutch's distinction between primitive and primitivism will be adopted.

trodden between respect for a culture and its exploitation. These broader issues, in relation to traditional objects and contemporary art, will be examined in this thesis.

This thesis will focus on contemporary response in terms of string, using the term 'string' in its broadest sense. In order to explore structural and conceptual relationships between traditional 'stringed things' of belief and contemporary art, the study will begin with the identification of certain features that traditional 'stringed things' have in common across cultures. Despite differences between religious and world views, it will be argued that recurring themes make comparative examination possible. The recurring themes provide a discursive framework to study contemporary art which echoes traditional 'stringed things'.

The identification of and discussion of 'stringed things' used by a range of cultures outside the Pacific Rim, as undertaken in this study, is essential for the identification of forms and meanings referenced by contemporary artists. It contextualises the research, given the history of interaction between countries and the global influences which impact on artists' work today.

The importance of indigenous 'stringed things' was often overlooked by colonising nations and researchers. It is not surprising that they received less attention in the past; their visual impact, in comparison to sculptural and painterly expressions, is often less immediately striking. They were dismissed as being merely decorative or ornamental, rather than representative of a conceptual world view. Today, Christopher Henshilwood[9] regards the manufacture of 'stringed things' as the first reflection of our ability to think symbolically and conceptually. When the 75,000 year old snail shells were found in the Blombos Cave on the South African Coast, there was great excitement. Henshilwood regarded these beads as the first evidence of the development of abstract thought and the basis for all that came afterwards such as cave art, personal ornaments and sophisticated behaviours. Even more

[9] Cited in Cauchi, S., "Beads Discovery Sheds New Light on Symbolic Thought," *The Age* April 17 2004.

recently, perforated shells, dated to be 100, 000 years old, have been unearthed from the Skhul cave in Israel. These shells, described as hallmarks of the modern human brain, are regarded as evidence of the ability to understand symbols and a concept of beauty.[10]

'Stringed things' are tantalising because of their dual nature: simplicity of structure linked with complexity of association. As Scott Rodolitz states, amuletic objects act as a 'shorthand', referencing and embodying whole conceptual systems in physical form, often in miniature. He says they are "representational, referential and decorative in equal measure, calling on something outside and beyond ourselves, and establishing a link between ourselves and that which empowers us."[11] Traditional 'stringed things' are aids to larger systems of memory and narratives that illustrate belief systems and codes of behaviour. This study will explore how contemporary art echoes, references, reinterprets, or recontextualizes these metaphorical shorthand systems.

Examples of contemporary art will be limited to work whose construction includes string[12] and/or references artefacts of traditional string and its attachments (such as beads, feathers, shells, and teeth). The contemporary 'stringed things' need not be wearable; they may be sculpture, installation or performance. They are included in this study if they explore the physical structure of traditional 'stringed things' of belief and their encoded meanings. Examples will be presented in a non-judgemental manner, without advocating a preference for any belief system or art expression. The examples of contemporary art selected for this study are primarily from the Pacific Rim because this is the region in which the researcher lives; the artists and their work are therefore more accessible.

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10 Cited in "Creativity Older than Thought" *The Weekend Australian* June 24-25 2006, p. 16.

11 Rodolitz, S., "Replica or Reference: A Reassessment of Pende "Ikhodo"," *The Magazine of Tribal Art*, vol. 31, 2003, p. 73.

12 As previously stated, the term 'string' includes synthetic and natural materials.

'Primitive' forms and the appeal of the mysterious have influenced late 19th and early 20th century art movements, such as the Fauves, Cubists, Surrealists and Expressionists. The exhibitions *Primitivism in 20th -Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York 1984) and *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris 1989) have become pivotal to the debate concerning cross-cultural influence in the arts. The exhibition context and the curatorial aspect of both exhibitions were provocative and continue to be influential. They raised issues about the relationship of contemporary art to 'primitive' art and vice versa. They questioned the role of art in society and history, particularly, where new forms were being recognised as art as a result of the recognition of the 'other'. The scant inclusion of 'stringed things' in these two major exhibitions may reflect the sometimes uncomfortable relationship that exists between ethnicity, craft, and high art. Tension between crafting and conceptualising, between skill and insight continue, as does the hierarchy of art processes and materials. The role of the gallery and curators, of the market place and dealers, are factors which have influence on artists and the kind of work they produce.

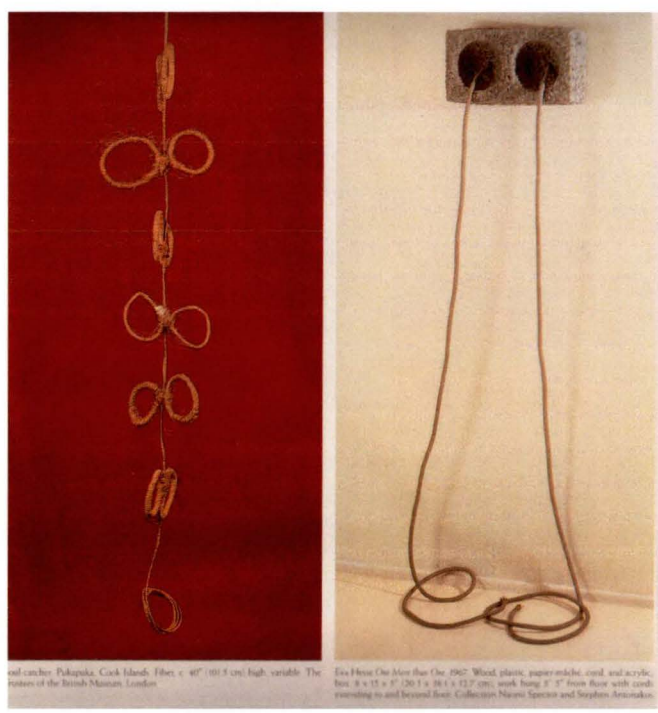

Figure 5 (left): Maker unknown *Soulcatcher* from the Island of Pukapuka, Cook Islands
Date unknown; fibre; 101.5 cm high, variable
Figure 6 (right): Eva Hesse *One More Than One* 1967[13]
Wood, plastic, paper mache, cord, acrylic; Box: 20.3 x 38.1 x 12.7 cm

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13 Rubin, W. S. et al, Eds, *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984, p. 70.

The *Primitivism* exhibition displayed traditional 'primitive' masks and sculpture next to form-related Western contemporary art pieces. The primary concern was an examination of the formal aesthetic relationships rather than an investigation of the symbols or encoded meanings. One of the few inclusions of 'stringed things' was *Soul-Catcher* from the Cook Islands and Eva Hesses's (1936-1970, German born American) *One More Than One* (Figures 5 & 6). *Soulcatcher* is a traditional cultural object, constructed of hoops. Its purpose, related to the belief system of those who made it, is to catch spirits. *One More Than One*, a contemporary work, is made of two suspended ropes emerging from vortexes. It is an exploration of absurdity. Both are simple in structure; both illustrate different ways of viewing the world. However, at the time of the exhibition, the curatorial purpose was to emphasise the similarity in structure and materials without addressing the content of each of the works. Criticisms such as 'formalism', 'decontextualisation', 'deforming ethnocentricism', 'imposing Western values on tribesmen' and 'cultural imperialism' were directed against *Primitivism.*

In this thesis, the links between traditional 'stringed things' and contemporary art practice will be examined not simply in formal terms but in terms of the meaning of the structures which underpin them. In doing so, it follows the lead of another major cross-cultural exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*, which sought to pay greater attention to the belief systems informing the work of 'artists' from non-Western cultures. This concern was indicated by the title of the exhibition; exhibitors were referred to as 'magiciens' rather than 'artists' to highlight the primary spiritual purpose of the works being exhibited. The objects were presented as objects with spiritual function rather than being viewed solely through the lens of Western formalist aesthetics.

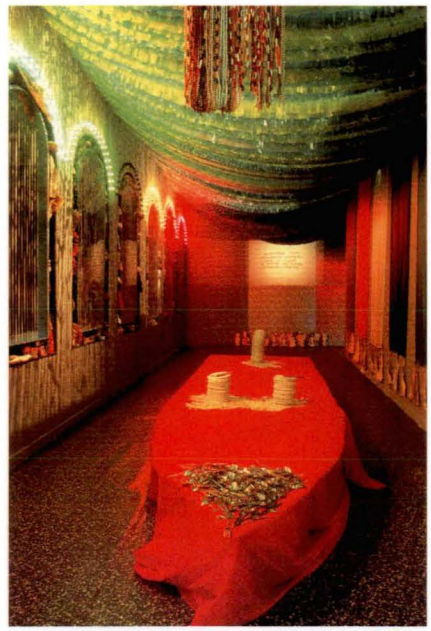

Figure 7: Antoni Miralda *Santa Comida: Holy Food* 1988[14]
Installation in the exhibition *Macigiens de la Terre*, Pompidou Centre, Paris
Constructed of multi-coloured paper streamers, beaded necklaces, red cloth, empty plates, popcorn, cigars, knives, forks, spoons and light bulbs

The contrast in approach between the two exhibitions can be seen in Antoni Miraldi's work, *Santa Comida: Holy Food* (Figure 7). This work was displayed next to Western contemporary art; however, similarity of structure was not a consideration in exhibition placement. Exhibited in *Magiciens,* this work, inspired from traditional sources and rituals, references them from within the belief system. Miralda (b. 1942, Catalan) created a sacred grove, a divinity house where the ceiling, constructed of multicoloured paper leaves, guaranteed protection from malevolent forces. Ancestral onlookers were called on to become cleansing cilia to purify the air.

Like *Magiciens de la Terre*, the aim of this thesis is to identify certain spiritual affinities across cultures focussing on the meaning of 'stringed things' and how these have been utilised by contemporary artists. It is contended that the identification of features which transcend particular cultures is an important way to bridge the gap between cultures and to enhance cross-cultural dialogue. At the same time, it is acknowledged there are meanings unique to specific

[14] Drewal, H. J. et al, *Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Light in the Yorùbá Universe* UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, 1998, p. 170.

cultures. This study takes the view that despite differences, there is something shared, something that makes it possible to communicate with one another.

'Stringed things' used by belief systems, such as Hinduism, Islamism, Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism and by indigenous peoples are not often discussed in association with one another. Indigenous systems of belief are not always readily transferred into a Western framework. Generally, indigenous systems of belief are considered 'integrated world views' where the sacred and the secular are connected and intertwined. In contrast, Western religious[15] systems tend to separate the sacred and the secular. Despite this difference, there are recurring themes in these different systems.

This study explores how contemporary artists source these traditional 'stringed things' for inspiration; how content may need decoding in a changing context; and how different audiences may arrive at varying interpretations. Decoding is often necessary in order to understand what is being presented. As Peter Timms[16] says, even the most straightforward-looking painting demands a certain amount of cultural connectedness, absorption of the basic mythologies of the culture and manner of its conveyance in order to understand what is being said.

The following chapter structure will be adopted:

- *Chapter 1*

Difficulties Surrounding the Study of Traditional 'Stringed Things'

This chapter will examine the constraints and limitations involved in the study of 'stringed things' associated with belief, in terms of the objects themselves and the information available about them.

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15 In this study, religion, in the Western sense of the word, refers to institutionalised systems of belief (Hinduism, Islamism, Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism) where values and practices are largely transferred with the use of written texts. Indigenous belief systems, in contrast, transfer knowledge of belief, values and practices, orally. Recently, some of the indigenous systems are being encoded in written texts.

16 Timms, P., *What's Wrong with Contemporary Art* University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2004, pp. 20-21.

- *Chapter 2*

Recurring Themes in Traditional 'Stringed Things'

A range of traditional 'stringed things' will be examined in terms of their structure and associated meanings. Recurring themes emerge which assist the examination of contemporary art.

- *Chapter 3*

Issues Surrounding Cross-Cultural Contact and Contemporary Artists

Currents and cross-currents in relation to cross-cultural contact, such as the appeal of the 'primitive', the search for the spiritual, cultural imperialism, appropriation, the agency of the gallery and the market place, turbulence and hybridity, are examined.

- *Chapter 4*

The Response by Contemporary Artists to 'Stringed Things' of Belief

Examples of contemporary art practice, with an emphasis on the art of the Pacific Rim, are discussed in terms of structure, process, intention, context and response. Trends in contemporary art practice are identified.

- *Conclusion*

Findings are presented in terms of their implications and significance. Recommendations for further study are suggested.

Chapter 1

Difficulties Surrounding the Study of Traditional 'Stringed Things'

This chapter will examine the difficulties surrounding the study of traditional 'stringed things' including historical bias, lack of object accessibility and lack of information. It will also examine the debates relating to the cross-cultural comparison of objects, in particular, universalism versus culture specificity.

There is a major difference between the oral history surrounding the 'stringed things' of indigenous cultures and the written history of 'stringed things' of structured religious/philosophical systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islamism, and Judaism. Many indigenous cultures, without a tradition of written history, have not documented their material culture. In the past, this knowledge was transferred orally, usually to selected people within the culture; it was less accessible and therefore more difficult to appreciate and understand. For instance, A. Elkin[17] remarks on the similarity of Australian Aboriginal practices with those of Tibetan practices, suggesting that Aboriginal practices may have been originated from the same source. He believes that the lack of written records explains why similar Aboriginal practices are less systematised. Inaccessibility and silence are stumbling blocks as far as knowledge of traditional 'stringed things' is concerned.

There are fewer problems in relation to the study of 'stringed things' of belief associated with established religions, in the Western meaning of religion, because of the availability of written history and information. However, in relation to the study of prayer strands, English language publications tend to concentrate on the development of the Christian prayer strand. Fluency in other languages would be necessary to obtain a fuller understanding about the prayer strands of other religions.

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[17] Elkin, A. P., *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*, Studies in Society and Culture, 2d ed, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1977, 1945, p. 64.

The Objects Themselves

Lack of Evidence and Difficulty of Access

One of the difficulties, in relation to the study of traditional 'stringed things', is that many have not survived. It is impossible to know which objects have been lost due to natural deterioration, lack of evidence due to secrecy, intentional destruction by the makers, accidental destruction due to conflict, and/or wilful destruction as a result of missionisation [18]or looting.

Organic objects, such as string and seed beads in particular, rarely survive the passage of time as a consequence of natural deterioration. For instance, the string/sinew/fibre used to thread 75,000 year old snail shells[19] found in the Blombos Cave on the South African Coast, was more susceptible to degradation than were the shells. It did not survive, nor did any evidence of symbolic thinking associated with string itself. Sometimes the existence of these objects is only known from photographic documentation or from their representation in more permanent media, such as terracotta and bronze/brass sculptures (Figure 8). This evidence is but a partial record of ancient practices nurtured by cultural beliefs.[20]

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18 Missionisation is a term used to indicate the reconfiguration of some belief systems and their material representation through encounters with other belief systems. In this paper, Christianity is the belief system responsible for reconfiguration. Missionisation varies in its practice, from the abolishment and destruction of beliefs, customs and artefacts inconsistent with Christianity, through to the melding of elements of both systems of belief. D. Mundine uses the term 'missionising' (Mundine, D., "The Native Born," The Native Born: Objects and Representations from Ramingining, Arnhem Land, Ed., Rudder, J. et al, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1996, p. 41.).

19 Cauchi, 2004, op cit.

20 Drewal, H. J. et al, 1998, op cit.

Figure 8: Maker Unknown, Figure from Ita Yemoo Ile-Ife, 87-1043 CE[21]
Leaded brass; dimensions unknown

Some objects have been intentionally destroyed by the people who made them; their significance ending with the completion of ritual and/or because their making rested only with those with power and authority. John Rudder[22,23] explains that some Australian Aboriginal objects produced in the past were never intended to last. They were representations of an inner reality that was considered eternally durable. The constructed form was an act of art and power; the process of making the object produced a transformation of some aspect of the inner reality. The inner reality was of value, not the outer manifestation in the object. Chris Gosden[24] further explains that some things are not agents in their own right. The material world is only given force and activity through human activity; retaining the object is not important.

Some things have never been recorded because they have been intentionally hidden as part of cultural practices and therefore often escaped the notice of

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21 Drewal, H. J. et al, 1998, op cit, p. 44. This image shows beads that are strung at body points of articulation and action. Evidence of Yoruba bead manufacture is dated between 87-1043 CE from calibrated carbon dating tests.

22 Rudder, D. J., "The Ceremonial Complex Banumbirr the Morning Star," *Nanumbirr Elcho Island & Bandigan Morning Star Collection* Elcho Island Art and Craft and Bandigan Aboriginal Art and Craft, Northern Territory, 2002, pp. 21-29.

23 Rudder, J. et al, *Banumbirr* Elcho Island Art and Craft and Bandigan Aboriginal Art and Craft, Sydney, 2002, p. 26.

24 Gosden, C. and Knowles, C., *Collecting Colonialism Material Culture and Colonial Change* Berg, Oxford, New York, 2001, p. 22.

researchers. For example, Robert Liu[25] remarks that in Africa, some waist beads are hidden from view accounting for their scarcity in historic or ethnographic photographs. Drewal[26] has observed that the Yoruba wear flags of beads or 'war' necklaces either fully exposed or hidden inside the shirt or blouse, around the waist or diagonally from left to right across the body. These flags of beads are worn as protection from the spiritual assault of aggressively envious people. In the USA (Detroit, Michigan), this tradition is sometimes used by women of Yoruba descent who wear beads under their clothes as a non-verbal sign that they are spoken for. At social occasions, men would become aware of the beads through touch when dancing with the women. The beads were only to be seen by the women's partners.

Secrecy may also be a measure of the sacredness or importance of an object to a group, not to be shared with those outside the belief system. Jamyang Gurung, a Buddhist practitioner, says: that

> Tantric practice is sometimes referred to as secret practice because it is not available to people in general and because those who practice are not generally allowed to declare to the world that they are engaged in those practices. Many of the commitments and the practices that go with them are hidden away from the general public view and are called the secret path. As part of the purification practice, many prayers - tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of prayers -are said on a set of prayer beads for that particular practice and nothing else. You are unlikely to see these beads. After they've finished their practice for that session, the prayer beads are tied in a special knot signifying that the session and practice are tied up.[27]

Sometimes secrecy is necessary for survival; fear of punishment causes secrecy. For instance, in the United States, the passing of the Freedom of Religion Act in 1978 meant that Native Americans were no longer jailed for

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25 Liu, R. K., *Collectible Beads: A Universal Aesthetic* Thames and Hudson, London, 1996, p. 16.

26 Drewal, H. J. et al, 1998, op cit, p. 108.

27 Mulford, T., *Interview with Jamyang and Uli Gurung: Buddhist Prayer Strands* South Hobart, 2004.

the criminal offence of practicing aspects of their indigenous spirituality.[28] It is not surprising, therefore, that practices prior to that date would have been held secretly. Drewal[29] reminds researchers that pressures caused by genocide and by social and political exclusion often make thoughtful people cautious about allowing things to be seen or said. In the light of African slavery and its aftermath, survival and salvation lay in the critical selective incorporation of ideas. This is illustrated by the Lukumi in Cuba who transformed white man's icons. They rethought and redesigned their century old images in order to maintain their belief systems. For example, gold chains were substituted for beaded necklaces because of the persecution suffered for displaying any sign of their African religion. Medallions depicting Catholic saints were "transculturalised" for banned divinities and were hung from gold chains to complete the ruse.

Nicholas Thomas states that missionisation has resulted in the wilful destruction of idols and rituals.[30] Missionisation occurred very early in the development of the Christian Church. The persecution of divination professors under Roman Augustan law and the Christian condemnation of pagan rites as magical reduced the influence of magical systems.[31] In the 1870's East Africa, the British destroyed conus shells worn as discs or discs cut in half because of their presumed link with paganism.[32]

Other objects have been lost through attacks of aggression such as war and looting.[33] World conflict spurs the desire to collect objects that may be destroyed in the regions concerned. Sometimes unscrupulous traders/collectors take advantage of the breakdown of governmental systems and the unfortunate circumstances of the people to purchase valuable items illegally. The ready

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28 Henry, G. and Marriott, S., *Beads of Faith* Carroll & Brown Publishers Limited, London, 2002, p. 100.

29 Drewal, H. J. et al, 1998, op cit, pp. 90-91,126, 129.

30 Thomas, N., *Entangled Objects Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England, 1991, p. 157.

31 Evans, J., *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Particularly in England*, 2d ed., Dover Publications, Inc, New York, 1976, pp. 11, 28.

32 Francis Jr, P., *Beads of the World*, 2nd ed., Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 1999, p. 108.

33 Budge, S. E. A. W., *Amulets and Talismans*, 2d ed., First Collier Books Edition The Macmillan Co., New York, 1970, pp. 87, 97.

moveability of 'stringed things' makes them ideal objects for this unscrupulous trade. Exports, looting from war-torn and Third World areas, and preference for ethnographic/ancient beads have depleted certain countries of their ancient beads. Recently, cylinder seals[34] were stolen on the days following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.[35]

Some of these objects represent a way of life seen as fast vanishing. In the zeal of collecting them, collectors do not always obtain the contextual information about the artefact.[36] There are many objects in public collections which have little or no associated information. For instance, there are examples of beautiful stringed chestbands[37] held by the National Museum of Australia whose full meaning is no longer understood. These chestbands were worn over the shoulder by women and children. They are made of multi-stranded fibre of various materials including human hair, which are sometimes pigmented. This lack of knowledge, in relation to Aboriginal objects held in private collections and public institutions, is not unusual.

The collection of artefacts without contextual information continues today. Liu[38] believes that the changing history of beads is affected by today's small traders, with vast exports of material culture such as beads from Africa and China to the West during the last two decades. This has resulted in the largest transfer of personal adornment in the twentieth century and perhaps in recorded history. Trading, collecting and the emergence of fakes have influenced the direction of current bead research. There is a focus on material identification to establish elements of the authentic. There are a large number of websites on the subject. Some[39] confirm that large quantities of beads are sold and that the unscrupulous are taking advantage of unknowing customers, offering their

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34 Cylindrical seals are used both as identification stamps and amulets to protect the wearers against sickness and evil spirits.

35 *The Cutting Edge Theft Cylinders Used as Seals from Iraq. Visits Iraq and Investigates the Sad Systematic Looting of Antiquities That Took Place on the Days Following the Fall of Saddam Hussein's Regime*, rec 10 Feb., Television, SBS, 2004.

36 Gosden, C. and Knowles, C., 2001, op cit, p. 56.

37 These chestbands and other 'stringed things' were examined with Louise Palmer, at the National Museum of Australia, 13 October 2004.

38 Liu, R. K., 1996, op cit, pp. 13-15.

39 www.rudraksha-ratna.com/fakeudrasksha.htm

sometimes dubious services for authentication. The level of demand for ancient beads is illustrated by the enormous sums buyers are willing to pay, from $100 to $50,000. Some publications (Leurquin, Crabtree and Stallebrass[40,41]) emphasise identification of the material and the beauty of the beads while making cursory reference to their function and cultural context. This reflects the need for information about the material of construction in order to verify authenticity. Other publications (Francis[42], Dubin[43]) are more thorough about presenting the meaning behind the objects in question, giving importance to the cultural context in addition to the aesthetic, material identification and financial considerations.

The Associated Information

Lack of Availability and Inherent Historical Biases

The collection of information is associated with the exercise of power. 'Who' collects the information often determines the 'what', 'why' and 'how'. The literature available is affected by historical perspectives and the cultural biases of those who collect and publish the information. Literature published in the early twentieth century in comparison to that of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries has differences in language overtone which reflects differences in mental and cultural framework when compared to current discourse. Many early twentieth century researchers of amulets and talismans were classically trained, often from Oxford and Cambridge Universities or working at such prestigious establishments as the British Museum. Scholars, such as Joan Evans[44] and E. A. Wallis Budge[45] had knowledge of and fluency in Latin and Greek. Some of their texts are written in several languages, without English

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40 Crabtree, C. and Stallebrass, P., *Beadwork a World Guide* Thames & Hudson, London, 2002.

41 Leurquin, A., *A World of Necklaces Africa, Asia, Oceania, America from the Ghysels Collection*, Trans. Ollivier, I. Skira Editore, Milan, 2003.

42 Francis Jr. P., 1999, op cit.

43 Dubin, L. S., *The History of Beads: From 30,000 BC to the Present*, Concise Edition, 2d ed Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1995.

44 Evans, J., 1976, op cit.

45 Budge, E. A. W., 1970, op cit.

translation of those sections. The assumption was that their readers would also be classically trained and able to read classical languages.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, 'pagan beliefs' were generally regarded variously as inferior; science dispelled the basis of these beliefs but did not dispel the consummate interest in the objects associated with them. The attitude was generally paternalistic, that of a superior intellect examining the curiosities of a less sophisticated culture. Susan Hiller[46] comments that in early 20th c England, formal systems of classification were developed for the study of indigenous objects, based on evolutionary assumptions emphasising a close relationship between race and culture. The objects were regarded to have scientific value, to be examples of evidence of the beginning of early human evolution; much like children's art is regarded as a precursor to adult expression. They were not considered objects of any great sophistication; there was a lack of understanding of the complexity of the cultures that produced the objects. The functionality of some of the objects precluded them from aesthetic high art consideration. Western ethno-centrism limited the knowledge and understanding of objects from cultures considered to be 'other'.

The written history of indigenous cultures has, until recently, been written by outsiders with a particular mindset. This has influenced the type of objects collected and the kind of information recorded about them. Today, the value of frames of reference other than the West's is developing. Objects are being reconsidered for their aesthetic considerations and their human and cultural value in relation to systems of living, rather than for their scientific value alone. This change of attitude is reflected in the exhibition of objects, previously considered as material culture, as art objects. The approach is becoming a more holistic one, one that reflects Elkin's [47] view. He says that we can distinguish but cannot separate the economic, religious, social and aesthetic aspects of 'primitive' man's life.

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46 Hiller, S., *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art* Routledge, London, 1991, p. 185.

47 McCarthy, F. D., *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art* Trustees of the Australian Museum, Australasian Medical Publishing Company, Limited, Sydney, 1938, p. 10.

Today, authors often acknowledge the importance of other ways of thinking heeding James Frazer's[48] warning that the history of thought cautions against concluding that science is the best-yet formulated, complete or final method of thought. Bernice Murphy[49] believes that a scientifically based archive of knowledge is an estranging system which imposes an ordered and ordering universe. She prefers a social representation system that connects with the object as an expressive form, where knowledge and meaning are dependent on one's relationship to the object. Robert Welsch[50] says that there are many agencies involved in conveying meaning of objects including the active parties involved in the production, sale, collection, and consumption of art. The complex relations among artists, patrons, collectors, and museums over time, with the different meanings given to art objects by each, require diverse interpretive frames to reflect complexity of influences and the multiple audiences.

The value, or lack thereof, ascribed to objects and to belief systems relating to the objects affects the quality of information gathered. 'Stringed things' have not been given the status of other objects in the past; information relating to their makers and associated function, rituals and stories has often not been recorded. Reasons for lack of status are varied. Sometimes, the objects were considered merely decorative rather than symbolic and therefore not worthy of serious attention. If researchers considered the makers to have less status in the community, such as women and children, then the objects manufactured by them were often less prized and were given less attention in the past. Today, objects made by women such as baskets, fish nets and other woven items, are being given much more status. This change of attitude is changing the social structure within communities.

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48 Frazer, J. G., *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 1st abridged ed., Macmillan, London, 1923, p. 712.

49 Murphy, B., "Aboriginal Art within the Museum of Contemporary Art," *The Native Born: Objects and Representations from Ramingining, Arnhem Land*, Ed., Rudder, J. et al, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1996, pp. 24-25.

50 Welsch, R. L., *Introduction: Changing Themes in the Study of Pacific Art*, Pacific Art Persistence, Change and Meaning, Eds, Herle, A. et al, Crawford House Publishing Pty Ltd, Hindmarsh, 2002, pp. 1, 10-12.

The richness of meaning found in Gary van Wyk's[51] recent research contrasts with former research procedures where this kind of information was often overlooked. Van Wyk recorded a high degree of symbolic and metaphorical meaning to the stringed beadwork among the Xhosa and Zulu-speaking peoples. For these peoples, abstract beadwork patterns convey meanings and provide 'readings'. They signify the spiritual because they are linked to the ancestors; they signal identity because they provide a sense of belonging to a people, to a place and to a chain of tradition. Their symbolic references indicate concepts that mirror the function of language. Sometimes their complex narratives are only intelligible within a limited geographical territory. The various functions of the patterns combine so that multiple simultaneous readings are possible dependent on one's knowledge.

The legacy of lack of meaning ascribed to indigenous objects by earlier Euro-centric researchers is that, today, many meanings are now incompletely remembered. Shirley Campbell[52], speaking in regard to Trobriand Island shields, says the Western mindset, too focused on a single aspect, such as narrative, overlooked other meanings. The attitude of some collectors and anthropologists in the early part of the 20th century reflect the belief of the time that the 'native' could only comprehend the vast social fabric in a simplistic way relative to the anthropologist. The inability to find coherent systems of meaning within indigenous communities by those outside resulted in the focus being on 'design style' in preference to meaning. The capacity of anthropologists to recognise meaning was affected because they did not know that closed systems of meaning known only to a select group existed in the community being studied. A considerable knowledge of the total social system is required for an in-depth understanding of meaning. Like the patterned beadwork of the Xhosa and Zulu-speaking peoples, the meanings behind the styles of Trobriand Island shields intensify as the different meanings interact with one another.

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51 Van Wyk, G., "Illuminated Signs - Style and Meaning in the Beadwork of the Xhosa- and Zulu-Speaking Peoples," *African Arts* XXXVI, 3, 2003, pp. 12-14.

52 Campbell, S., "What's in a Name? The Search for Meaning," *Pacific Art Persistence, Change and Meaning*, Eds, Herle, A. et al, Crawford House Publishing Pty Ltd, , Hindmarsh, 2002, pp. 163-173.

Other examples of sacred objects, previously regarded as mundane, include shields and shell pendants of some Australian Aboriginal groups. Elkin[53] speaks about the importance of design used on shell pubic pendants of the Karadjeri tribe in North West Australia. The design symbolises the sky culture heroes and cannot be made on the shells except by men who know the 'song' that belongs to the design. The making is usually accompanied by sacred chanting. The association of song and myth with designs is an essential feature of sacred life. Similar chanting often accompanies their display. Elkin says: "The designs which are in themselves symbols of the mythological world –the world of spiritual power –together with the associated songs or chants, impart a 'virtue' to the weapon or other object which they adorn."[54]

Some levels of meaning remain restrictive; as such, their deepest significance will likely remain impenetrable to all but the authoritative senior members of the community. Elkin[55], in his 1940's studies, documents examples of Aboriginal men of 'higher degree' who have been admitted to secrets not disclosed to the ordinary though fully initiated man[56]. Their 'higher degree' status meant that they were regarded as medicine-men, doctor man, sorcerers, clairvoyants, or mediums by their community. These men used a range of magical cords, stones, crystals and shells in their practice.

Sometimes, some groups do not wish to share knowledge of their objects to outsiders. For instance, Aunty Corrie Fullard, a Tasmanian Aboriginal and maker of traditional shell necklaces, who exhibited necklaces at Dick Bett's Gallery, Hobart, commented that the shells used in traditional Aboriginal necklaces were processed using methods that were closely guarded trade secrets.[57] The 'right' to talk or use certain objects is sometimes a matter of dispute within the larger indigenous community, perhaps reflecting agendas

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53 McCarthy, F. D., 1938, op cit, p. 9.
54 McCarthy, F. D., 1938, op cit, p. 9.
55 Elkin, A. P., 1977, 1945, op cit, p. xx.
56 Initiated men are those who have been prepared for the custodianship of tribal mysteries, and indoctrinated with respect for tribal sanctions and norms of life.
57 Choy, H. L., "Necklace Worth Shelling out For," *The Mercury* 5 May 2004.

other than sacredness.[58] Right of access can determine the accuracy and quality of information. Timms[59] comments on the cultural sensitivities surrounding indigenous communities today saying that even the most benign and well-intentioned commentary may fall victim to accusations of ignorance, condescension or racism.

There is a changing attitude towards 'stringed things', particularly in Australia. The 1996 book *The Native Born*[60], illustrates both bark paintings and 'stringed things'. However, the 'stringed things' are not described with the same detail as are the bark paintings. Authors such as Louise Hamby[61], John Rudder[62], and Edwin Ride[63] are recognising and recording the 'stringed things' of the Australian Aborigines as important cultural expressions. The structures and associated meanings are being recorded in cooperation with the communities who make the objects.

This changing attitude is reflected in the manner in which the National Museum of Australia[64] engages with the indigenous community in regard to the objects previously collected and being repatriated. It recognises that objects are imbued with power by those who have belief in them. They care for the objects respectfully without necessarily participating in those beliefs. The repatriation of objects fosters and enhances relationships between the groups involved. The objects are returned to the community, as is the authority over the objects. This empowers the Aboriginal community. Protocols have been developed for storing, viewing and exhibition which take into account the belief systems of the Aboriginal people. The museum is no longer just a collecting agency; it engages with communities whose objects have been and are being collected in a more respectful manner in relation to the community.

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58 "Bone-Pointing Raises Aboriginal Ire," *Mercury* 27 April 2004.

59 Timms, P., 2004, op cit, pp. 59-60.

60 Rudder, J. et al, *The Native Born: Objects and Representations from Ramingining, Arnhem Land* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1996, p. 47.

61 Hamby, D. L., "Sacred Fibres and Celestial Strings," *Fibre Art from Elcho Island*, Ed., Hamby, D. L. School of Applied and Performing Arts, The University of New South Wales, 1994.

62 Rudder, J. et al, 2002, op cit,.

63 Ride, E., *Armlinks* Darwin Visual Arts Association Inc, Darwin, 1998.

64 Kaus, D., *Negotiating the Care of Secret/Sacred Objects* Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2005.

Increasingly, the objects and the associated rituals are being documented in written and visual form, sometimes by outsiders trusted with the information, but more and more by the custodians of the cultural information. This makes it possible for researchers today to engage with the meanings of traditional 'stringed things' despite the previous difficulties.

The difficulties associated with discovering original meanings of traditional 'stringed things' has been a spur for artists in their expression. They seek to rediscover lost embodied meaning, to raise awareness of its loss, and to recontextualise and clarify the meaning so that others can engage with the objects. For instance, Julie Gough's art and research practice involves uncovering and re-presenting historical stories. She says her work is:

> ...part of an ongoing project that questions and re-evaluates the impact of the past on our present lives. My work is concerned with developing a visual language to express and engage with conflicting and subsumed histories and a key intention is to invite a viewer to a closer understanding of our continuing roles in, and proximity to unresolved National stories - narratives of memory, time, absence, location and representation.[65]

Debates Surrounding Cross-Cultural Comparisons

The focus of this study is on what makes us able to communicate with one another with the aim of enhancing cross-cultural dialogues. It is contended that similar attitudes, reflected in the physical objects which represent different cosmological and religious systems, can co-exist with meanings unique to different cultures. The ability to have cross-cultural dialogues leads to enriched meaning when viewing art.

This thesis supports a balance between universalism and cultural specificity in order to avoid the pitfalls of views at the extreme end of each spectrum. The pitfall of extreme universalism can be the piecemeal appropriation of ideas and

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65 Julie Gough webbio Townsville, Australia, February 2005.

objects without an in-depth understanding of their contextual meaning[66]; while the pitfall of extreme specificity is the denial of the possibility of change, where cultures cannot absorb and respond to new influences and where no cross-cultural comparisons or dialogues can occur. The result of the over-emphasis on the universal or its opposite, purism or exclusivity of a particular cultural framework, is that meanings, dialogues and understandings are missed.

It is useful to examine differing views relating to the value of cross-cultural generalisations because these attitudes influence artists, the kind of art they produce and the response to it. Most criticism of the concept of cultural universals is directed towards the extreme view which does not adequately acknowledge the existence of significant cultural differences. A writer who is against the concept of universalism is Jasdev Singh Rai[67], who regards it as a colonial attitude where principles and concepts become generalised rather particularised to one's own cultural context. He prefers the concept of pluralism which, for him, is based on respecting the other for what they are, not what they can be in another's terms.

Elisabeth Costello, a character in John Coetzee's[68] novel, also warns against the danger of claiming universality for our culture's standards. Other cultures have their own norms and see no reason why they should adopt those of the West. Marianna Torgovnick[69] cautions the West against projecting its concerns onto the 'primitive', such as our oceanic aspirations or faith in a universal human nature or a combination of all these things. An unquestioned projection of one's cultural concerns onto another interferes with the identification and recognition of values that are different. Likewise, Sieglinde Lemke[70] dislikes

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66 Howell, S., "Art and Meaning," *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art* Ed., Hiller, S., Routledge, London, 1991, p. 235.

67 Rai, J. S., "The Monologue of Liberalism and Its Imagination of Sacred in Minority Cultures," 2005.

68 Coetzee, J. M., *Elizabeth Costello* Knopf, 2003, Milsons Point NSW, p. 107.

69 Torgovnick, M., *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, p. 246.

70 Lemke, S., "Primitivist Modernism 1998," *Primitivism and the Twentieth-Century Art a Documentary History*, Eds, Flam, J. and Deutch, M., University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2003, p. 413.

the overemphasis on the universal but he also recognisee the limitations of cultural relativism. He prefers the possibility of cultural hybridity.

At the same time that one has to be cautious about being insensitive to cultural differences, an emphasis on specificity is equally limiting since it undermines the possibility for cross-cultural dialogue. For instance, Canadian author Sharon Butala, elucidates her view of the limitations of cultural specificity:

> I have said that I have no Native blood that I know of and that I knew little about Native people's spiritual beliefs and ceremonies. Nonetheless, as a result of such experiences, I seem to have found myself drawn into their world as I seek to understand my own. I do not want to trespass; I do not want to make claims about or on things I have no right to and don't understand because my history is a different one from that of the Natives of the Great Plains...Rather than reconstructing or copying Native beliefs, these understandings of the spiritual world, it seems to me, come with Nature, come out of Nature itself; come with the land and are taught by it.[71]

Similarly, Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Laclau's[72] also caution against the need to be too specific about identity because specificity is too limiting. They believe that identity is always in flux and is dependent on the presence of the 'constitutive other'. They also see dangers in the modern nomadic cosmopolitan identity, which is not hinged to the particular. They see a need for balance.

This study takes the view that despite differences between cultures, there is something shared, something that makes it possible for us to communicate with one another. It is contended that cultural specifics can co-exist with universals. The value of a balanced concept of universalism is that it represents the possibility of shared meaning. The following chapter will focus on this shared

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71 Butala, S., *The Perfection of the Morning- an Apprenticeship in Nature* Harper Perennial, 1994, p. 112.

72 Mouffe, C. and Laclau, E., "Hope, Passion, Politics," *Hope - New Philosophies for Change*, Ed., Zournazi, M., Pluto Press Australia, Annadale, 2002, p. 141.

aspect, on the examination of 'stringed things' in terms of their structure and other associations to reveal recurring themes across cultures and time.

Chapter 2

Recurring Themes in Traditional 'Stringed Things'

This chapter explores a range of 'stringed things' associated with belief since an understanding of associations, encoded meanings, and conceptual content related to them is necessary to recognise contemporary references and/or recontextualisations. The emphasis will be on traditional 'stringed things' and on the identification of recurring themes.

Generally, similarities between indigenous 'stringed things' and those codified in religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islamism, and Christianity, have not been elaborated by historians. When discussed in association with one another, indigenous 'stringed things' tend to receive cursory mention.[73] Lack of knowledge, as discussed in the previous chapter, the result of historical circumstances and the lack of a written history, are some of the reasons for this cursory comparison. Others include the uncertainty as to how to discuss the objects, and increasingly, the sensitivity about the 'right' to talk on behalf of another's material culture.[74] The lack of historical evidence is slowly being addressed by researchers.

The chapter will begin with the discussion of the simplest string structures and progress to more complex structures where objects such as beads, shells or feathers are attached. The objects selected have been chosen to illustrate widespread use rather than to provide a definitive encyclopaedic list.

'Stringed Things'

String, stringing and knotting are at the basis of our civilisation. E. J. W. Barber[75] says: "String seems such a simple, almost inevitable invention, yet its

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73 Henry, G. and Marriott, S., *Beads of Faith* Carroll & Brown Publishers Limited, London, 2002.

74 *Respecting Cultures Working with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community and Aboriginal Artists*, Arts Tasmania, 2004.

75 Barber, E. J. W., *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*, 1st ed., Norton, New York, 1994, p. 70.

appearance was a momentous step down the road of technology." String is a powerful tool in taming the world through the use of snares, nets, handles, and the making of complex tools. It is not surprising that its significance should extend beyond the practical into the metaphorical where the sacred and the secular are intertwined.

Metaphorical associations in relation to stringing and knotting are evident across cultures and across time. The most common metaphors relate to connections within communities and the binding between the present, past and future. Some examples are specific to certain groups such as the Indian wedding cord, Tongan *lelava*, and Peruvian knots. Others are more universal, such as string figures, string crosses and prayer strands.

The earliest and simplest neck decoration in India was probably a strip of palm leaf to which the traditional South Indian gold marriage ornament was attached. Today, the palm strip has been replaced by a 3-knotted cotton cord, dyed yellow with tumeric. The Indian wedding cord exemplifies the metaphorical relationship between string, contract and union. The string is placed on the bride's neck during the marriage ceremony and is not removed until the death of either the bride or the groom.[76]

Figure 9: Maker unknown, Tongan *lelava* binding, date unknown[77]
Coconut fibre; dimensions unknown

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76 Untracht, O., "Around the Indian Neck Traditional Ornaments," *Ornament* 22.1, 1998.

77 *Lelava Lahing Workshop, I Filipe Tohi (Tonga)*,
Available: Www.Southproject.Org/South1/Workshops.Htm, 4/07/2004.

An example of practical and metaphorical binding is *lelava* (Figure 9). *Lelava* is the traditional Tongan coconut fibre binding system used to lash canoes together and to bind timber in house construction. Filipe Tohi, (Tongan, arrived in New Zealand 1978) describes it as his people's DNA, so essential is it to their identity.[78] Another simple string system is the Peruvian *quipu* knot that is used to aid memory and keep records. It is a system of knot-writing where colour and knot-type and distance between knots have different meanings.[79]

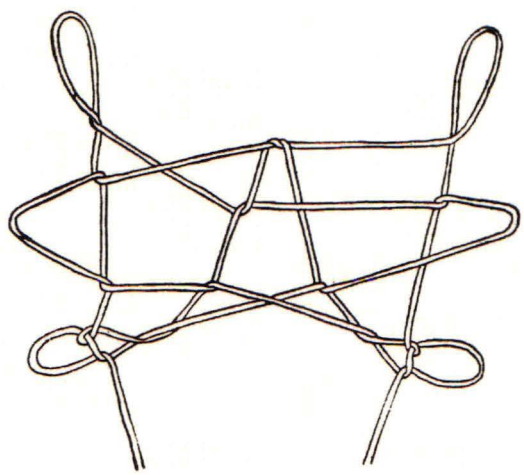

Figure 10: *Corroborree* String Figure or Cat's Cradle[80]

In contrast to these culturally specific string arrangements, others, such as string figures[81], appear to be universal (Figure 10). According to Kathleen Haddon[82], they are everywhere, with the exception of Eurasia, where no evidence has been found. The practice of making string figures is bound up with transfer of knowledge, belief and mythology. Many of the mythological

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78 Ibid.

79 Miller, J. D., *Beads and Prayer the Rosary in History and Devotion* Burns & Oates, 2002, pp. 76-77.

80 Haddon, K., *Artists in String String Figures: Their Regional Distribution and Social Significance*, 2 ed., Methuen & Co. Ltd, London, 1979, figure 31A, p. 106.

81 Daniel Davidson says that the intertwining of figures on a closed loop of string can be regarded collectively as string games; however, he prefers to recognise three main classes to differentiate them. These three classes include: 1) string tricks and catches, 2) cat's cradle, and 3) string figures. These classes are similar in principle and probably related historically. The string tricks and catches have an element of surprise and appear to be used for entertainment. Cat's cradles, known to western Europeans, is characterised by uniformity of procedure. String figures include both string tricks and catches and cat's cradles, but are characterised by a relative complexity of procedure and intricacy of pattern. Davidson, D.S., "Aboriginal Australian String Figures" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 84, No. 6 August, 1941, 763-901, pp. 765-771. In this study, string games are regarded as a collective entity.

82 Haddon, K., 1979, op cit, p. 106.

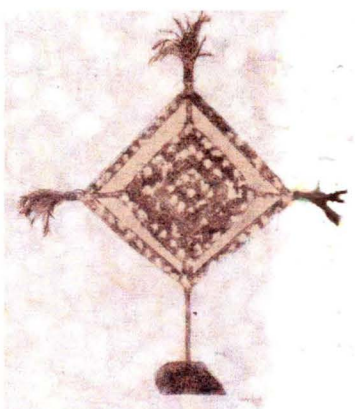
associations have been lost due to Western influence and missionisation; remnants survive in Polynesian, Inuit, and Papuan societies. Cat's cradles may be regarded as virtual drawings or drawings in string representing the familiar and the important for particular groups. Meanings and associations of string figures vary with social context, as do makers' restrictions (gender and marital status) and taboos regarding the appropriate time of making. Patience and skill, repetition and memorisation, social interaction and communication, are required to make string figures.[83] Originally, the effort required to make string likely added to the importance of string figures.

The thread cross is another example of a 'stringed thing' which is widespread around the world (Figure 11 and 12). Daniel Davidson[84] says it appears in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Indonesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, Melanesia and Australia. It is yet to be determined whether thread crosses developed independently in each region or whether they are historically connected through migration and/or contact. They are almost always associated with festive occasions, religious processions and rituals, or initiation ceremonies.

83 Bangarra Dance Company *Unaipon* 2004
In the dance, *Unaipon,* Bangarra Dance Company drew on the heritage of string games used by Ngarrindjeri to pass on knowledge through storytelling. Contemporary artists, such as Maureen Lander and Julie Gough also source cat's cradles in their work, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.
Photograph of Unaipon, Strings Section; Photographer: Greg Barrett; Choreographer: Francis Rings sourced Museum of South Australia for string figures; Jpeg provided by Stephen O'Connor, Bangarra Dance Company, email, 23 July 2004.

84 Davidson, D. S., "Australia: Material Culture. The Thread Cross in Australia," *Mankind*, 1951, p. 263.

In its simplest form, the thread cross consists of two sticks crossed at right angles to which a long string is attached at or near the intersection. The string is then tautly drawn from arm to arm, with a half hitch on each, and continues to be wrapped successively and progressively outward until an area of desired size has been filled. Variations on the thread cross include the thread star, thread rectangle and thread circle. Details and embellishments vary according to region.



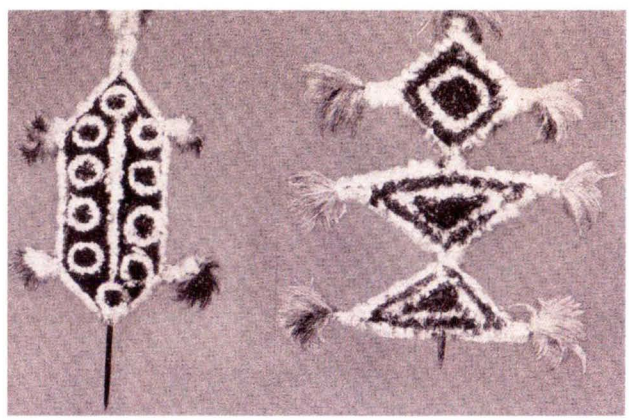


Figure 11(left): Maker unknown, Thread Cross, date unknown[85]
Wood supports, string and feather down; dimensions unknown
Figure 12 (right): Maker from Aranda tribe, Thread Crosses, date unknown[86]
Wood supports, natural white and red feather down; dimensions unknown
Centre: *Kutakuta* (Nightbird)
Right: *Inola* (Spider)

The structures are flimsy, precluding their discovery as archaeological specimens in most parts of the world. In addition, some are destroyed or disassembled after their use in ceremony, as is the case with Australian Aborigines, according to Davidson. The string, given its importance, is preserved for future use. Often, evidence of thread crosses can only be substantiated when their use is witnessed. In Australia, Aboriginal words for thread crosses vary according to region, some of which include *inma, ilma, waninga, pungana, milang ba, bunderdu,* and *nurtunja*. Frederick David McCarthy[87] says that these sacred Aboriginal thread crosses may be carried in the hands, set in the ground or worn on the head. In Central Australia, patterns are made with natural white and reddened feather down and may represent

85 Ibid, p. 266.
86 McCarthy, F. D., 1938, op cit, p. 30.
87 McCarthy, F. D., 1938, op cit, pp. 32-33.

totems such as the Nightbird (*Kutakuta*), the Spider (*Inola*) or Caterpillar (*Tnurungatja*). Sometimes the significance of the materials is related to totemic considerations.

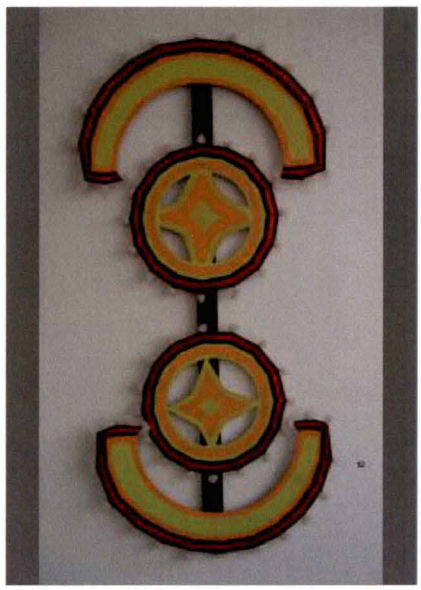


Figure 13: Roy Wiggan *Ilma* 2005[88]
Acrylic on plywood. cotton wool; dimensions unknown

Today, Roy Wiggan (b. 1930, Aboriginal) a senior Bardi man, is a custodian of many of the traditional songs and stories of his people. He is the only member of his community entitled to make new *ilmas* (Figure 13). He no longer remembers all of the songs associated with the designs and is concerned that the oral history and the songs associated with the thread crosses may be lost. Traditionally, these objects were not sold. Wiggan makes and sells them in the hope that they will be preserved for future generations through the Western art system. He uses cotton wool, acrylic paint and plywood in place of the traditional materials of hair, ochres, bark, feathers and native cotton. They illustrate physical things and natural phenomena such as animals, tides, rain and country but they also represent the relationship the Bardi have with their country and concepts relating to spiritual world. Each *ilma* embodies a particular song/story and is used to help teach laws and moral codes associated with the song/story.[89]

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88 http://www.moragalleries.com.au/2005/ilmas.html, 13 Feb 2006.

89 Ibid.

String has always been a most important item in many Australian Aboriginal societies, whether it is hand-spun from plant fibres, human hair or fur. Louise Hamby[90] states that strings generally have serious ritual function in Australian Aboriginal society, for the sacred as well as for mundane everyday usage. String materially binds people together, manifesting and mediating their relatedness to one another and to the land. It is used in love magic to attract a love; to connect family members to one another and to disconnect them from someone who dies. It is used for religious purposes, 'stringing' together places marked by the ancestors as they walked the earth during the Dreaming. The tracks made by an ancestor when moving through the country link the sites as a sequential string of places.

Another example of stringed material which has ritual and metaphorical meaning are the feathered strings of the Yolngu, which are fashioned for each clan and worn when dancing the journeys of the first ancestral creators. The journeys are manifested in story, song, and dance. Louise Magowan[91] discusses how moral accountability amongst the Yolngu is represented in these feathered strings. Ritual feathered strings, such as armbands, headbands and dillybags, metaphorically tie people and homelands together by their designs; they spiritually constitute the moral fibre of Yolngu being. Each person possesses their own ritual string given in recognition of their development of ritual knowledge; it signifies the relationship that each individual has towards their homeland(s) and reflects their rights and obligations. An example of moral obligation can be found in the making and breaking of string. The woman, during the process of making the string, rolls fibres of moral and emotional obligations into her relational journey with others. A man can break his moral duty to a woman by cutting his ritual string if he chooses.

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90 Hamby, L. and Young, D., *Art on a String Aboriginal Threaded Objects from the Central Desert and Arnhem Land* Object-Australian Centre for Craft and Design, The Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, 2001, pp. 9-10.

91 Magowan, F., " 'It Is God Who Speaks in the Thunder...' Mediating Ontologies of Faith and Fear in Aboriginal Christianity," *The Journal of Religious History* 27, 3, 2003, pp. 303-304.

Figure 14: The Morning Star Ceremony[92]

There are many examples of string's metaphorical significance in relation to Australian Aborigines. The metaphors vary with the groups and regions. For instance, the Morning Star Story of Arnhem Land is related to the planet Venus Figure 14). Susan Congreve[93] explains that the ceremony associated with the Morning Star invokes ancestral time and entwines human and spirit realms; the sacred merges with actual time, place and action. It is about string connection with the spirit world.

Other examples of Aboriginal string, belief and metaphor are listed by Elkin[94]. He tells of the belief, amongst the Dieri near Lake Eyre, of a spirit which visits the sky by means of a hair-cord. In Southeast Australia, a magic cord is sung into the doctor men during its making. It becomes a means of performing marvellous feats, such as sending fire from the inside of the medicine man, or travelling to the sky or the tops of trees and through space. The Queensland Bandjelang[95] Aboriginals talk of invisible clever rope endowed with magical power.

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92 Rudder, J. et al, 2002, op cit, p. 10.

93 Congreve, S., "The Morning Star in North East Arnhem Land," *Nanumbirr Elcho Island & Bandigan Morning Star Collection* Elcho Island Art and Craft and Bandigan Aboriginal Art and Craft, Northern Territory, 2002, pp. 12-13.

94 Elkin, A. P.,1977, 1945, op cit, p.20.

95 Elkin, A. P. 1977, 1945, op cit, p. 140. They are from Cabbage Tree Island, Richmond River, Queensland.

String is also used in the making of garments that seem to have no practical function suggesting symbolic or metaphorical meaning. Barber[96,97] notes that sculptures of ancient Palaeolithic Venus figures (20,000 BC) had string skirts or tasselled girdles that had no discernable practical function. She suggests that the string skirts are non-linguistic statements of status in regard to availability, and childbearing capacity.Their significance is more symbolic than practical.

Australian Aborigines, too, have an assortment of stringed garments which appear to have no practical function. Some of these garments are metaphorically related to creation. On the north shore of Arnhem Land, it is believed that the original creative spirits, the Djang'kawu Sisters, came across the ocean and along the coast, wearing string headbands, belts, chest harnesses and string armbands. They gave birth to the first people and taught them their language, songs, ceremonies, laws and customs.[98] Feather appendages to the stringed garments carry a range of meanings such as the marking of a journey, connecting landscapes, people, and/or family lineages. For some Australian Aboriginal people, string can be lightning or rainbows of colour that act as potent manifestations of ancestral power connecting the sky and the earth. String is pragmatic in that it joins and holds objects together; it is metaphorical in that it joins the object, people, land, spirit and history together. The sacred and secular are bound.

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), bilums or string bags have both secular and sacred use. They are used for carrying wood, babies, food but they have much more significance. They are often part of ceremonial attire at the time of death, mourning, birth, initiation and marriage. Susan Cochrane[99] says the word 'bilum' is synonymous with 'womb'. Generations of anthropologists have concentrated on male activity; the study of women was considered to be peripheral to studies of society. These Eurocentric values led to the

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96 Barber, E. J. W., 1994, op cit, pp. 44-45.

97 Barber, E.J. W., Prehistoric Textiles The Development of Cloth in the Neolothic and Bronze Ages Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1991, p. 257.

98 Hamby, L. and Young, D., 2001, op cit, p. 17.

99 Cochrane, S., *Beretara Contemporary Pacific Art* Halsread Press, Rushcutters Bay NSW, 2001, pp. 96-97.

presumption that bilums were a women's thing only representing women's values. New understandings reveal that some bilums are used in men's rituals and are still believed to be effective in providing protection in the supernatural realm. Bilums remain important; their colour and pattern changing with the availability of new materials and local fashion. Inter-clan fighting in PNG has discouraged widespread tourism; therefore local market demand, rather than the tourist demand, is considered to be the force behind changes of design. P. Sillitoe[100] remarks that, in the PNG Highlands, both men and women do not consider themselves fully dressed without a bilum.

Other stringed garments in the PNG Highlands represent relational codes, such as the in-law avoidance hood. The hood, made of string, is worn by women so as not to look directly at their son-in-laws. These are no longer as common as previously.[101] Another example of clothing and body adornment that indicate social ties and obligations is Highland mourning attire (dress, skirts and job's necklaces). Mourning attire not only indicates grief but is also related to increased exchange activity after a death. These exchanges, which could continue for an extended period, reflect obligations between members of the community. Productive activity is abandoned whilst wearing mourning attire.[102]

When objects, such as shells, shark vertebrae or whale teeth, are attached to the string, their scale increases and they are less likely to be overlooked. However, the encoded meanings are often not understood by those outside the group. Shell and teeth ornaments are widespread throughout the Pacific; they are objects with symbolic meaning and have high cultural exchange value. The exchanges recognise obligations and bind members within a group and with outside exchange groups. Examples of such objects include phallocrypts (pubic shell pendants) and *tabua* (whale teeth).

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100 Sillitoe, P., *Made in Niugini Technology in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea* British Museums Publications and The University of Durham Publications Board, London, 1998, pp. 221, 254.

101 Ibid, p. 267.

102 Ibid, p. 553.

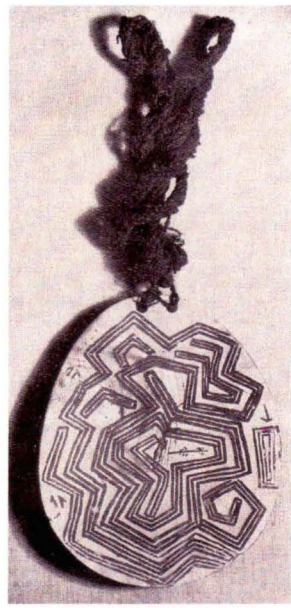

Figure 15: Maker from Wyndham, Northwest Australia, Aboriginal Phallocrypt [103]
Date unknown; pearl shell infilled with red ochre, human hair; dimensions unknown

Pearl shells have cultural importance for the Aborigines in Western and Northern Australia. McCarthy[104] refers to the pearl shell as phallocrypts (Figure 15). They are incised on the polished side; the incised lines are infilled with red ochre. They are bartered by tribes over vast areas in Western and Northern Australia, for use in initiation rites and cannot be worn by the uninitiated. The meanings of shells differ from region to region, and reflect personal status and depth of ritual knowledge. Kim Akerman and John Stanton's[105] recent publication of Kimberley pearl shell in Aboriginal Australia, reveal that the forms and meanings of shells and the decorative motifs on the shells are constantly changing. They may have deeply religious meaning, being perceived as evidence of metaphysical phenomena. The shell's strong association with water, rain, and lightning, makes it emblematic of *life* in its own right, its sheen related to well-being. Shells worn by both men and women variously as pendants, forehead and temple ornaments or suspended from belts worn. The shells have many uses: personal adornment, magic and sorcery, rain-making, and socio-economic exchanges. Akerman and Stanton

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103 McCarthy, F. D., 1938, op cit, Figure 26, p. 42.

104 McCarthy, F. D., 1938, op cit, p. 44.

105 Ackerman, K. and Stanton, J., *Riji and Jakoli: Kimberley Pearl Shell in Aboriginal Australia* Northern Territory Museum of arts and Sciences, Monograph Series No. 4, 1994, pp. v, 19, 22, 23, 27, 32, 63.

distinguish between systems of exchange for secret-sacred objects as compared to those of a secular nature.

Sillitoe[106] explains that in the Highlands of PNG, body adornment objects are valuable as transactual wealth in ceremonial exchanges, which, in turn, are linked to political order and stability. Pearl shells with their attached fillet or string have high exchange value at ceremonies and are often protected by shell wrapper coverings. These exchange ceremonies are customs that are sanctioned and inherited from the ancestors.

Figure 16: Maker unknown *Tabua* date unknown[107]
Tooth of sperm whale, coconut fibre; dimensions unknown

In Vatalelea, Fiji, whale teeth, *tabua*, rather than pearl shells, have mystical meaning. They are considered to be a sign of cosmic generativity, simultaneously engaging with the spiritual and temporal worlds. They are regarded as female surrogates, with the form of the breast with nipple carved at one end and the vulva on the other. A cord *wa* is attached at both ends and is a symbol of kinship, of connection between two groups and are used during funerary rituals and in formal wedding ceremonies. The original meanings given to certain objects can change over time. Many original meanings, which relate to cosmology, status, gender and group identity, have in varying degree

106 Sillitoe, P. 1998, op cit, pp. 379-383, 554.

107 http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/fiji/details.aspx?ID=911&Mode=ByTopic&Topic=, mn011957_lg.jpg, accessed 15 June 2006.

been subsumed by the larger myth of Fijianness.[108] *Tabua* are gifts that mark the sacredness of giving women in marriage, represent social relationships such as land rights and help in warfare. The importance of *tabua* lies in the transactual value that reflects and acknowledges social relationships.

The transactual wealth of New Caledonia is shell money, a composite of shells, flying fox bone, flying fox fur, vegetable cord, and beads to form a god figure. It is more than money; it is a representation of life and the continuity of the group. This shell money composite is wrapped in a vegetable cloth purse/basket that is closed by a drawstring that must never end in a knot. The basket and shell money are not to be touched without undergoing ritual. Creeper vines are used to avert the dangerous powers emanating from the basket.[109] Knots or their absence can be of enormous symbolic value. In Arnhem Land the ancestral shark *maiṉa* is particularly important for the Dhuwa people. The shark is often depicted towing the sacred string/rope line *Bundhamarr*. This rope line unravels as the shark swims with it through saltwater country connecting groups of people.[110]

More codified belief systems, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islamism and Judaism, also use strings and bindings to represent encoded meanings. Their written history makes knowledge of them more accessible to those from outside the belief system. In these systems, numbers of strings, knots and /or bindings have multiple levels of meaning. Like the 'stringed things' of indigenous peoples, their understanding may be dependent on a person's level of religious practice. They, too, act as reminders of teachings, moral codes and obligations associated with the belief system.

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108 Ewins, R. H., "*Ethnic Art and Ritual in the Negotiation of Identity the Social Role of Bark-Cloth in Vatulele Island, Fiji*," PhD, University of Tasmania, 1999, pp. 211-212, 243.

109 Guiart, J., *The Arts of the South Pacific* Thames and Hudson, London, 1963 pp. 122-124.

110 Hamby, L. and Young, D., 2001, op cit, p. 16.

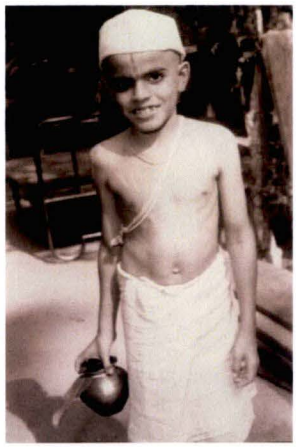

Figure 17 (left): Hindu poonool string[111]

Figure 18 (centre): Jewish tzitzith[112]

Figure 19 (right): Jewish prayer straps *retzuos*[113]

Hinduism has a Brahmin three-stranded sacred thread, *poolnool*, worn by males as a symbolic representation of a boy accepting the Brahmin moral rules (Figure 17).[114] Buddhism has a red protection or blessing string symbolic of the strong protective field of the lama who tied the knot in the string and blew the power of his mantra in it. Jews have *tzitzith*, tassels of eight strings with thirty-nine windings and five knots, all of which relate to the spiritual link between man and God (Figure 18).[115] They also bind *tefillin*, two sets of leather boxes containing passages of the Torah, on the head and arm, with prayer straps *retzuos* as symbols to overwhelm the pull of the passions and the intellect in order to enable the practitioner to focus within (Figure 19).[116, 117]

The words and references used for string/stringing by different cultures provide an insight into their meanings. For instance, if the word 'text' is related to the word 'textile', string and words become intertwined and interwoven. Words, mantras, myths, stories, songs, prayers are often essential to the use of sacred

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111 http://www.namboothiri.com/articles/poolnool.htm

112 Kaplan, A., *Tzitzith a Thread of Light* National Conference of Synagogue Youth/ Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, New York, 1984, p. 10.

113 Photograph by T. Mulford, *Interview with David and Pnina Clark: Strings in the Jewish Religion* Sandy Bay, 2004.

114 *The Significance of the Sacred Thread*, Chennai Interactive Business Services (P) Ltd., Available:http://www.chennaionline.com/specials.aavani/articles/sacred.asp., 1/08/2004.

115 Kaplan, A., 1984, op cit.

116 Mulford, T., *Interview with David and Pnina Clark: Strings in the Jewish Religion* Sandy Bay, 2004.

117 Henry, G. and Marriott, S., 2002, op cit, pp. 49-54.

'stringed things'. The phrase "blowers on knots" refers to magicians who recite incantations intended to harm or heal whilst tying knots in a string. The words weave spells with the string.[118] Prayers recited on prayer strands indicate faith and acceptance of codes of behaviour.

The Sanskrit word *sutra* means 'suture' and 'sew' referring to spun thread and to the sacred rule/book, illustrating that thread is used symbolically as a code of behaviour.[119] The Yoruba, too, regard needle and thread metaphorically. The needle is sent in advance of the thread and beads to create the path and facilitate the movement of the elements. The needle invites the beads and the unseen powers they represent to join together to form a meaningful collective. The string joins members of the community with unseen powers.[120]

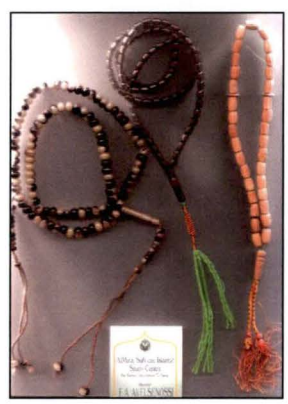

Figure 20 (left): Christian prayer strand[121]
Figure 21 (right): Islamic prayer strands[122]

Prayer strands have a longer written history than indigenous 'stringed things', therefore more information is available. Prayer strands of different religions have a similarity of structure, making them easier to examine together (Figure 20 and Figure 21). Prayer strands cannot be separated from other associations, such as mathematical ideas, status, culture, adornment, magic, medicine, colonisation, currency, and exchange of materials and ideas. They are full of

118 Budge, E.A. W., 1970, op cit, pp. 62, 67
119 Wilkins, E., *The Rose-Garden Game a Tradition of Beads and Flowers* Herder and Herder, New York, 1969, p. 206.
120 Drewal, H. J. et al, 1998, op cit, p. 100.
121 http://www.customrosaries.com/example-rosaries/ Accessed 17 July 2006.
122 Prayer strands from AlMiraj Sufi and Islamic Study Centre for Human Development To Being

intellectual, social, psychological and aesthetic significance, not unlike indigenous 'string things'. Some prayer strands are very simple knotted strings; others are made of precious materials that often have inherent meaning.

The simplest knotted string rosaries are the *kombologion* used by Greek Orthodox and the *vervitsa* or *chotki* used by the Russian Orthodox. For the most part, however, beads are used instead of knots. The counting/registration of prayers is only one of the functions of prayer strands. They reflect a belief in outside power/s. Their structure encodes the teachings and codes of behaviour associated with the belief system and are reminders of moral obligations. They are affirmations of one's place in a community and may reflect one's status in that community. The relationship of materials to deities and practices are numerous and complex and vary between and within belief systems. Some prayer strands are made of materials considered to be talismanic thereby providing double protection. Some cultures believe they have healing powers or the power to exorcise evil spirits. The material used for beads sometimes reflects the wealth of the owner. The changing nature of the structure and materials also reflects the changing nature of their use. They are evidence of faith, devotion and practice; they are an intrinsic element in a pious discipline to induce a state of detachment and an altered state of consciousness. They reflect the possibility of salvation and hope for paradise.

Like thread crosses and string games (cat's cradles), there is uncertainty about the development of the prayer strand, whether it developed independently or was evolutionary as the result of contact. The earliest known use of prayer beads is illustrated on sandstone sculptures of the Sunga and Kushan periods (185BC – AD 320), which portray Hindu sages holding prayer strands. According to legend, the rosary's origin is in the 6th century BC when Sakyamuni paid a visit to King Vaidurya, a recent Buddhist convert.[123] King Vaidurya had no peace of mind and claimed that the dharma was too deep and

[123] Dubin, L. S., 1995, op cit, p. 31.

complex for him. The Buddha advises him to string 108 seeds of Soapberry tree and to repeat the refuges or teachings, moving one bead at a time.[124]

The history of prayer beads is a mixture of fact and myth. A. B. Dorsey[125] says the question of how and when prayer beads first came into use remains largely unstudied. She conjectures that a mystical connection between sound and a garland of beads developed in India as an outgrowth of Vedic culture. The Vedic tradition has a profound reverence for sound where language and the Sanskrit alphabet are regarded as holy emanations of the ultimate being. This garland or mala became the prototype for prayer beads and rosaries in later cultures around the world.

Wilkins[126] believes that prayer beads are not a discovery or an invention attributable to any single source. She believes that patterns of religious activity are basically similar, that all 'higher religions' evolve a 'reciter'. These 'calculi' - strings of knops, knots or beads- are to be touched and moved along like beads of an abacus so that prayers and invocations can be recited the prescribed number of times without having to keep count. The mind, not having to focus on counting, can then reach a state of detachment. Buddhists, Hindus, Mohammedans and Christians alike use this mnemonic aid 'to pray without ceasing'. There are variations in the number pattern, material, size, arrangements of beads and in the way they are worn or carried as well as the prayers recited on them according to the period, place, religion, sect and cult or devotion.

In many cultures, the word used for 'bead' is associated with 'prayer and praying'. The word 'rose' is closely linked to 'rosaries' and to 'garden' and therefore by association to paradise/Eden. The English word 'bead' comes from the old Anglo Saxon *bede* meaning prayer (biddan to pray).[127] The English *bid* comes from two Germanic verbs, one meaning to command and

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124 Dorsey, A. B., "Prayer Beads in Asian Buddhist Cultures," *Arts of Asia* 34, 4, 2004, p. 48.

125 Dorsey, A. B. 2004, op cit, p. 47.

126 Wilkins, E., 1969, op cit, pp. 26-27, 32-35.

127 Seyd, M., *Introducing Beads* London, B T Batford Limited-Guptill Publications, New York, 1973, p. 10.

the other to ask. The German word for bead *gebet* means prayer. In 16th and 17th c Vienna, beads were often called *petter, betten.* The telling of one's beads is keeping a tally, keeping count of one's biddings or prayers. The essential form of the rosary is that of knot-writing, knotting prayers in, as in the Gordian knot or the muttering knot (*gruzein* to grunt, mutter, or mumble).[128]

Another word *buddh* refers to the acquisition of spiritual understanding or illumination; becoming a Buddha and *bidding beads* may have the same root. The Hindu prayer strand is called *smarani* meaning 'remembrancer' and *japamala* 'muttering chaplet'. Knop, related to knot, means bud, which in turn has associations with flowers and the rose in particular. No one can explain the origin of the word rose, possibly derived from the Greek word *rhodon,* which, in turn, is connected to the word *rheein* 'to flow', alluding to the flow of the blossom perfume. Others connect rose to *rota,* a wheel, because it is a rotund flower.[129] The Arabic word for rosary *wardiya* comes from the w-r-d or *ward* meaning rose. *Ward* has other associations in ancient Semitic languages including 'watering-place', 'to blossom', 'to enter', and 'to travel', all meanings that relate to the function of prayer.[130]

Wilkins[131] explores the plant associations of other prayer strands. The Burmese Buddhist *bodhhi*, and the Hindu prayer strand *akahamala* are made of berries *elaecocarpus ganitrus* called 'eyes' or *aksha* because of the characteristic slits on their surface. The eye, sometimes known as Shiva's eye, is the third eye, the opening of which corresponds to attaining spiritual enlightenment or 'illumination'. The Hindu prayer strand is called *rudrakshamala*, the mala or chaplet of Rudra, an aspect of the god Shiva. Many of the words have symbolic meanings. In Europe, a flower garland is called a *corona*, a crown; a chaplet is *chapelet* a little *chapeau* or head gear; *Rosenkranz* refer to prayer beads.

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128 Wilkins, E., 1969, op cit, p. 207.
129 Wilkins, E., 1969, op cit, pp. 26-27, 77, 109, 115.
130 Henry, G. and Marriott, S., 2002, op cit, p. 10.
131 Wilkins, E., 1969, op cit, pp. 44, 148-149.

The rose is associated with the *rosarium*, the rose garden, and in turn Paradise and the Garden of Eden. Paradise from the Persian word *firdaus* and the Arabic words *jenna* (paradise) and *janaina* (garden) share the same linguistic root.[132] The rosary, connected with the rose garden in Persia, is said to have originated in India from the god Shiva, and to have spread east to China and Japan and north to Tibet.[133]

There are symbolic associations between flowers, gardens and prayer beads. The name for prayer beads in Tibet and India is the Sanskrit word *mala* meaning garden or garland of flowers or necklace of beads. The oldest name for Hindu prayer beads is *japamala,* a muttering chaplet or rose chaplet, presumably because originally the beads consisted of the rolled petals from the flower rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*).[134] Wilkins[135] traces how the term 'rose-garden', *rosarium,* originated partly in the Middle Ages, primarily in Germany, and partly to pre-Christian cults in Classical times. He links the concept of *rosarium*, the enclosed cloistered garden, to other ideas of meditation practice and the seeking of the unattainable. The shape and concept of an enclosed garden also has reference to the circle shape of the rosary.

Since ancient times, prayers have been recited in cycles, reflecting the cycles of life. Countless ceremonies exist in which a circle is used to join people together, to create a sense of place, to protect what is within, to concentrate force and to keep out what is dangerous. The rosary's circular form has different meanings - religious and psychological. In meditation, the circle enters the mind in contemplation, ringing oneself in, focusing attention within.[136]

Number, in relation to the number of beads and the number of strings, is important in the structure of different prayer strands. Numbers may vary between different belief systems and even within them. Numbers are abstract

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132 Henry, g. and Marriott, S., 2002, op cit, p. 10.
133 Seyd, M., 1973, op cit, pp. 10-11.
134 Dubin, L.S., 1995, op cit, pp. 31-32.
135 Wilkins, E. 1969, op cit, pp. 110-111.
136 Dubin, L.S., 1995, op cit, p. 32.

and therefore, are useful in leading the mind to contemplate more abstract thoughts, concepts, or teachings. These are, in turn, reminders of obligations and codes of behaviour. The Buddhist *varnamala,* a rosary of fifty beads with inscribed the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, also represents the knowledge inherent in the alphabet.[137]

At various points in history, the introduction of sumptuary laws reflected the class and status implications of prayer strands. In the Middle Ages, rigid costume laws exempted the rosary from the jewellery ban; this led to the burgeoning interest in devotional beads.[138,139] Wilkins[140] comments on the social and devout implications of materials used. If you considered yourself a wretched sinner, your prayers would be recited on the simplest of materials as a mark of humility and self-abasement. In the Middle Ages, ecclesiastics denunciated worldliness and self-indulgence to keep the laity devout and decent; however, these denunciations of vanity had class implications and were often directed at social inferiors. In 1473, the sumptuary laws of Leipzig

137 Dorsey, A.B., 2004, op cit, p. 47.

138 Coles, J. and Budwig, R., *World Beads*, Ryland Peters & Small, London, 1997, p. 8.

139 David Beckham wearing two rosaries
Image source: http://beckhamsite.tripod.com, September 2004.
Recently, the wearing of rosaries by David Beckham and Britney Spears revived the issue of rosaries as jewellery and caused renewed interest in wearing them.
(Petre, J. and Sapsted, D., *Church: Rosaries Aren't Just Cool Necklaces*, 24 October 2004, Chicago Sun-Times, Available: http://www.suntimes.com/output/religion/cst-nws-rosary24.html, 9/11/2004 2004.)

140 Wilkins, E., 1969, op cit, pp. 49-50.

forbade maid-servants from wearing coral paternoster. In 16th c England, prior to Henry VIII's attempt to abolish the use of prayer strands during the Reformation, Virgil commented on the luxury of prayer strands worn as jewellery. The Counter Reformation, in turn, encouraged the use of precious and glittering material in the making of prayer strands.

Beads as status symbols were also institutionalised in China. Official court beads -mandarin chains- were worn by the emperor, nobility, officials, army officers, wives and children during the period of Manchurian rule in China (1644-1912). Mandarin officials fingered their beads, handling them like worry beads but also used them as abacuses for business calculations. These status symbols were influenced by the Tibetan rosary, *trengwa.*[141] Here, the sacred and the secular were combined.

Recurring themes

The range of string examples studied in this section illustrates that they are indicators of shared belief systems and of identity within a group. Their structure and materials have encoded meanings. The making and ceremonial use often involves the senses, particularly in terms of sound and movement. Their use is part of a process that connects people to one another and to the 'other' world. They are reminders of moral obligations and reflect the aspirations of the users.

Cosmological and religious belief systems acknowledge their relationship with the 'immaterial' world. Guiart[142] says that in Oceania, the idea of death does not involve the concept of annihilation. Death is rather another kind of life. The cult of ancestors is also found in Christianised regions of Oceania. John Rudder[143, 144]explains that the Australian Aboriginal Yolngu and most Australian indigenous people see reality as double-sided: the Inside and the Outside. The Outside, the place of everyday life and material substance (the

141 Dubin, L. S., 1995, op cit, p. 57.
142 Guiart, J., 1963, op cit, p. 49.
143 Rudder, J. et al, 2002, op cit, p. 24.
144 Rudder, D. J., 2002, op cit, pp. 21-29.

earth, humankind, animals and plants and everything made for everyday use), is of low significance compared to the Inside. The Inside, the place of non-physical existence where the pre-born and the ancestral beings exist, is the real reality. Usually this Inside location is simultaneously thought of as a geographic place as well as a dimensional shift.

Established religions also acknowledge the immaterial world using different words to identify it. For the Hindu, it is final union with the supreme *mosksha*. For the Jain it is the state of bliss in the form of *siddha*. For Buddhists, it is enlightment or *nirvana*. For Moslems, it is paradise. For Christians, it is heaven. Just as different belief systems have different terms to acknowledge the immaterial world, so too do their 'stringed things' have different associations. The 'stringed things' do however, provide the physical evidence of faith, devotion and practice, and have many layers of meaning, sometimes not understood by those outside the belief system.

The intrinsic power of 'stringed things' lies in the belief of those who use them. For believers, these objects are infused with spirit and their use indicates and reflects how a particular community mediates with the cosmological forces of the universe to create meaning.[145] Different cultures regard string and the process of stringing not only as a physical element/process but also a metaphorical one. 'Stringed things' have intellectual, social, psychological and aesthetic significance. The rituals associated with their use maintain a sense of communal unity and renew social continuity and cohesion. Social well-being is the consequence of individual participation.

Making string and the stringing of beads are serial in process and seriate in composition. The act of beading, like reciting the rosary, is a reverential, repetitive and meditative ritual for many of the indigenous peoples of the America (Huichcol in Mexico, Iroquois in the USA and the Objibwe in Canada) and provides a conduit to the divine immaterial world. Beading

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145 Gosden, C. and Knowles, C., 2001, op cit, pp. 19, 22, 180.

codifies spiritual beliefs and is inseparable from praying and connection with the spiritual realm.[146]

The ability of 'stringed things' to appeal to the senses is important for the association to abstract concepts. They appeal to most of the senses, with the exception of taste. The engagement of the senses helps to produce a sense of detachment from the material world. The structure and material of construction often have visual appeal; but sometimes sight is visualisation, a turning in and looking inwards. The materials sometimes have fragrance to appeal to the sense of smell. Perfumed rosary beads, made with a paste of finely chopped rose petals, become hard and black when dry'. Other scented materials include nutmeg, coffee beans, cloves, tiny oranges and pomanders.[147] Wilkins[148] discusses the possible reasons for scented beads. In Europe scented beads were often worn for aesthetic as well as prophylactic reasons for protection against the plague or syphilis and for masking odours as the result of the decline of washing. An Austrian custom, around the year 1706, consisted of attaching silver scented death heads filled with balsam to prayer strands as *memento mori.* In China, when laity wore a smaller musk-scented rosary of eighteen *lohans* at the waist, it was called *hsiang chu* 'the fragrant beads'.

The attached objects and the texture of the string appeal to the sense of touch. Dubin[149] remarks that prayer strands are sometimes the ascetic's only material possession and are highly sensual, inviting continual handling. He is sympathetic to the view held by psychiatrist, Robert Bross, who believes that touch is the primary sense for an infant and that the passion for beads may be connected to the longing for tactile pleasures associated with breast feeding and the nipple.

The use of 'stringed things' can require the full attention from the body to incorporate rhythmic movement and regulated breathing. The activation of the senses produces a change of mental state and can alter some of the body's

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146 Henry, G. and Marriott, S., 2002, op cit, pp. 99, 103.
147 Seyd, M., 1973, op cit, p. 11.
148 Wilkins, E., 1969, op cit, p. 60.
149 Dubin, L. S., 1995, op cit, pp. 9, 32.

physical functions. The effect on the body and on brain patterns due to the sensual nature of the use of 'stringed things', prayer beads in particular, has been studied scientifically.[150,151] Miller states that a slow respiratory rate of six breaths per minute has beneficial effects on cardiovascular and respiratory function and increases arterial baroreflex. Repetitive prayer synchronised with the inherent cardiovascular rhythms give a feeling of well-being and perhaps increase responsiveness to the religious message.[152]

Sometimes the physical positions adopted during use represent a quest to re-engage with the ultimate. Prostration symbolises human lowliness before a higher being. Some 'stringed things' produce sound as they are being used. More commonly, sound is in the form of words, prayers, stories or songs. Willam says that the holding and slipping of beads through the fingers acts as a counter-distraction making bodily repose easier, freeing the body from its nervous tension and offering the possibility of greater potentiality for recollection of prayer and reflection on the mysteries. External mechanical movements reduce distractions.[153] Seyd agrees with this view, explaining that in order to approach a spiritual centre, mental exercise is combined with rhythmic movement. Breathing is coordinated with movement, words, singing or chanting. He argues that man is an animal that fidgets; therefore the involvement of the senses combats interior chaos and focuses concentration.[154] In Tibetan practice, the repetition of the words '*omni padme hum*' is considered an elemental transcendent mantra that reverberates with numinous primeval sound. The importance of breathing is reflected in the Tibetan mala practice called *tan-ce*, which means 'to purr like a cat'.[155]

So important is the engagement of the senses with the use of stringed things, that denial of this need may affect belief and practice according to Christopher

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150 Carroll, M. P., "Praying the Rosary: The Anal-Erotic Origins of a Popular Catholic Devotion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.* Vol 26 (4), 1988.

151 Bernardi, L. et al, "Effect of Rosary Prayer and Yoga Mantras on Autonomic Cardiovascular Rhythms: Comparative Study," *BMJ: British Medical Journal,* Vol 323 (7327), 2001.

152 Miller, J. D., 2002, op cit, p. 102.

153 Willam, F. M., 1952, op cit, pp. 181-183.

154 Seyd, M., 1973, op cit, pp. 67-68.

155 Dorsey, A. B. 2004, op cit, p. 50.

Pearson[156]. He believes that the progressive position on liturgy, which rejects cultural aesthetic appeal, has been partially responsible for collapse of faith and practice. He is sympathetic to von Blathasar's concept of beauty as a transcendental property of being along with goodness, truth and unity.

Summary

There is a wide range of 'stringed things' associated with religious and cosmological belief. Recurring themes emerge. They are signifiers of higher power/s or force/s (There is something external). The higher powers may be comforting or terrifying; and sometimes require an intermediary such as a priest, shaman, rabbi, guide, gate-keeper, or elder. They are signifiers of identity (You believe and belong). They are evidence of faith, devotion and practice, of an indication of group identity and connection, and of an indication of place and status within a group, reflecting internal class structure and social order.

They are mnemonic devices which operate as reminders of teachings, moral codes and obligations associated with the belief system. The structure is encoded with meanings. Numbers, colours, and material relate to teachings, moral obligations and relationships. The meanings are multi-layered; understanding often is dependent on level of practice or status within the group. Some systems of knowledge are closed. The processes of making and using 'stringed things' are imbued with meaning. Making may have as much meaning as the thing being made. Use has order and structure, involving repetition and reiteration, which results in a sense of mental freedom (transcendence) as a result of sensual engagement and heightened awareness. The processes are often associated with other rituals and are part of a larger performance and ephemeral experience. The 'stringed things' and their use reflect strived-for outcomes, in the short and long term, such as, mental transformation or an altered state of consciousness during practice,

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156 Pearson, C., "Sensual Appeal of Worship," *The Weekend Australian* April 17-18 2004, p. 18. He believes Aboriginal Australia to be singularly fortunate because its ceremonial life is generally recognised as being important and worthy of respect.

reaffirmation of place within a community, connection with land, and/or the hope of salvation, paradise or connection with ancestors.

This chapter has examined the simplicity of structure and the complexity of meaning associated with 'stringed things' across varying cosmological and religious world views. Recurring themes across cultures have been identified, which will assist in the examination of contemporary art which echoes and re-interprets 'stringed things'. The next chapter will examine how cross-cultural contact influences contemporary artists.

Chapter 3

Issues Surrounding

Cross-Cultural Contact and Contemporary Artists

Contemporary artists work in a world where exhibited images are reproduced, circulated, and viewed almost instantaneously. This world, in which colonising histories have become entangled, is characterised by increased cross-cultural contact, interaction and exchange. The art of both the First and Third Worlds has been influenced by contextualisation, recycling, appropriation and re-appropriation. Cross-cultural contact has blurred boundaries, forcing artists to navigate and negotiate their positions. For some, it offers the opportunity to promote an understanding of their particular culture; for others, it is about developing hybrid forms that reflect the exchange.

The currents and counter-currents of the exhibitions *Primitivism in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York, 1984) and *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989) continue. The West's fascination with the 'primitive' is countered by accusations of cultural imperialism and racism. The search for the spiritual is countered by romanticism. The benefits of agencies, such as galleries and the market place, are countered by the negative impact on traditional societal structures. The accusation of Western appropriation and exploitation is countered by the return accusation that if this is so, then Third World art, influenced by Western Modernism, is derivative.

This chapter explores the arguments in relation to the push-pull of cultural navigation and negotiation, in order to provide a context within which to discuss the referencing of traditional 'stringed things' by contemporary artists, the focus of the following chapter. It will be argued that cross-cultural dialogue, although difficult, is enriching so long as there is acknowledgement of the cultures in question and the right to differ is respected. Different and

opposing views need not be destructive or oppressive. As Isabelle Stengers says:

> The question of what makes us human cannot have a unique answer, because it is the central question for many diverging traditions. More precisely, if I get one answer it would mean the 'we' have succeeded in destroying all others.[157]

The examination of diverging points of view and the logic behind them provides a framework by which art responses and the motivation behind them can be better understood. Diversity of expression requires many tools to interpret and comprehend it, not only for the art of one's culture but for that of other cultures. Understanding motivations encourages sensitivity to opposing views, promotes dialogue and can result in new shared insights.

The 'Savage': Currents and Counter-Currents

Since the 19th century, the 'primitive' has appealed to the West, being seen as the realm of the savage, the sensual and the exotic. 'Primitive' forms were often used by Western artists without understanding the meanings imbued in them.

This continues to a certain extent today. For instance, some Western designers source ethnic cultures as alternatives to European models for inspiration for contemporary body adornment, appropriating symbols from other cultures without an understanding of their contextual significance. Turner[158] says that contemporary jewellery eclectically rummages through symbolism, mythology, metaphor, and ethnic cultures. New technology and discarded industrial waste are combined to create contemporary ethnographic artefacts, objects of 'savage luxury'. London cyber-punks are an example of this eclecticism; their futuristic ethnic appearance signals rebellion and challenge to established norms (Figure

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157 Stengers, I., "A 'Cosmo-Politics' - Risk, Hope, Change," *Hope - New Philosophies for Change*, Ed., Zournazi, M., Pluto Press Australia, Annadale, 2002, p. 263.

158 Turner, R., and Crafts Council (Great Britain), *Jewellery in Europe and America: New Times, New Thinking* Thames & Hudson, London, England, 1996, pp. 7-8, 88.

22). Today, peoples whose 'primitive' appearance and forms were sourced, are returning the West's gaze and demanding reconsideration.

DONNA NOLAN
Cyberpunk, London, 1991

Figure 22: Cyberpunk[159]

In contrast to *Cyberpunk*, the *Pacific Sisters*, dressed in their 'savage luxury', turn the mirror back onto the West (Figure 23). They reinterpret and recontextualise traditional Pacific cultural activity and street culture through performance in a gallery context at arts events. They hybridise street culture and create neotribal forms which play on the 'primitive', the savage and the exotic.[160] This pop version of the tribal is seductive and subversive at the same time. It is not just entertainment or jewellery display. The glamour is enticing but it also demands a reconsideration of the West's view of Pacific identity.

159 Ibid, p.88.

160 Herle, A. et al, Eds,, *Pacific Art Persistence, Change and Meaning* Crawford House Publishing Pty Ltd, Hindmarsh, SA, 2002, p. 407.

Figure 23: The Pacific Sisters performing in Samoa[161]

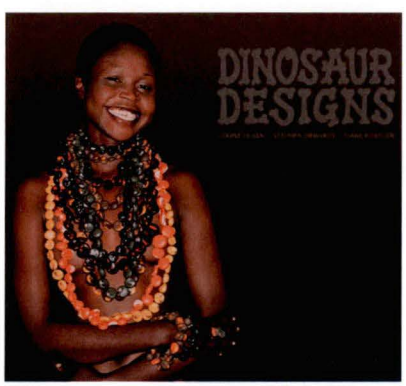

Figure 24 (left): Postcard advertisement

Figure 25 (right): Electronic cover page

The *Pacific Sisters* highlight the West's attitude to 'dusky' maidens and to the removal of meaning from 'primitive' inspired jewellery. The use of 'coloured' or 'dusky' models illustrates the continuing appeal in the West of the paradisal and the exotic (Figures 24 & 25). For some, this reflects the West's appreciation for beauty of the 'other'; for others, it has colonialist and racist overtones.

161 http://www.fina.canterbury.ac.nz/research/ 31 October 2005.

Michael and Anna Mel, Ples namel (Our place), 1996, performance at the Asia Pacific Triennial. Photo courtesy Queensland Art Gallery.

Figure 26: Michael and Anna Mel *Ples Namel (Our Place)* 1996[162]
Performance at Asia Pacific Triennial, Brisbane

Michael and Anna Mel also use performance and participation to make the viewer question their viewing biases in relation to the 'primitive'. Unlike the *Pacific Sisters* who hybridise material culture, the Mels use traditional material culture in their work, *Ples Namel (Our place)* (Figure 26)[163]. The audience is invited to paint Anna's body and to help her put on her jewellery. The power of the art setting, which creates certain constructs, is harnessed to convey their message. The audience accepts that this is not just entertainment or re-enactment of ritual. Audience participation means that the artists can not dictate the outcome; this makes them vulnerable and heightens the response. Participation enables the viewer to go beyond exoticisation into acknowledgement of the 'other' and to question the validity of their stereotype. The gaze is not only returned; it is exchanged.

The Third world is increasingly making the West aware that the use of and recontextualisation of certain cultural images and symbols reflects constructed meaning not necessarily related to original meanings and that their

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162 Mel, M., "Encountering Ples Namel (Our Place)," *Art Monthly Australia* July, 121, 1999.

163 Ibid, pp. 17-20.

inappropriate use can be offensive. In response, the West is becoming conscious about the need to negotiate the use of symbols and to respect the cultures from which they are sourced.

Search for the Spiritual

Modern secular society, characterised by the dissolution of many traditional systems of social order, places a strong emphasis on the individual. The loss of shared rituals has caused alienation and a crisis of meaning and identity. Integrative indigenous belief systems and rituals are attractive to the West because they offer possibility of experiencing the 'authentic' and a sense of community. The West's search for the spiritual in the 'primitive' is a way to counter its secular individual-oriented technocratic materialist culture.[164]

Cross-cultural contact alters our understanding of the world and the concept of who we are. In Western culture, a wide range of formal religious systems exist alongside individually constructed systems. Some belief systems are hybrids of existing systems, reflecting the increased contact and interaction between different cultures. Many concepts of belief exist. For instance, Nevill Drury and Anna Voigt regard 'spirituality' as intangible and open to debate. For them, it is more than religious faith or belief. It is a sense of transcendence in the universal sense, which touches directly on the fundamental mystery of creation. Drury considers the mid 90's interest in the spiritual, religious and mythological to be a continuation of 1960-70 interest in mysticism, comparativism and eastern thought. In addition, the development of a feminine perspective in relation to mythologies and life/death/rebirth cycles of totemic cultures have further contributed to this interest.[165]

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164 Klesse, C., "'Modern Primitivism': Non-Mainstream Body Modification and Racialised Representation," *Body & Society* 5, 2-3, 1999.

165 Drury, N. and Voigt, A., *Fire and Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art*, Craftsman House, Roseville, N.S.W., 1996, pp. 7-8. Drury and Voigt curated the 1996 exhibition, *Fire and Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art*, which showed the work of a small selection of established and mid-career Australian artists who explored spiritual issues in a variety of ways. Artists included: James Gleeson, Kate Biscoe, Inga Hunter, John Coburn, William Ferguson, Rover Thoma, Mirlkitjungu Millie Skeen, Gloria Temarre Petyarre, Tim Johnson, Marion Borgelt, Anne Judell, Wendy Stavrianos, Lyn Plummer, Sebastian di Mauro, and Ted Snell.

The 1970's Modern Primitives[166] movement, an anti-establishment and revolutionary sub-culture, originated as a response to lack of ritual and spirituality in American culture. It continues to have significance. The Modern Primitives search for sources of 'authenticity' in 'primitive' imagery and rites. They believe that the return to and integration of 'primitive' knowledges, techniques and lifestyles would benefit modern alienated industrial capitalised society. Although the movement stresses the spiritual, its eclecticism is not located within any religious context.[167] The movement reflects discontentment with the contemporary condition of powerlessness in a technocratic society. However, their ideology and practices contradictorily repeat Western cultural imperialist attitudes from which they profess to be alienated. They appropriate and commodify non-European cultural practices and rituals, which they dehistoricize, decontextualise and apply out of context. In a manner similar to the exhibition, *Primitivism in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* New York, 1984, they do not situate the cultural elements which inspire them.[168] Their practices aestheticize ethnic differences and commodify them.

The sacred and the market place have had a history of conflict. However, the marketplace need not, of necessity, deny spirituality, meaning, or the capacity to transcend the material world. Objects can have multiple values, just as they can have multiple meanings. Nevertheless, some artists believe that the spiritual or transcendent dimension of art is being threatened by market place values. This belief influences the construct and materials in art work. For instance, Western preoccupation with materialism and monetary value is regarded by Michael Lander, a New Zealand artist, as depleting the spiritual aspect of some art work. He looks to pre-historic ideas and simple low-cost materials to counteract this. He says:

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166 The Modern Primitives movement, which originated in 1970's California, attempts to define the boundaries of the body in a technological age, through body piecing, constriction, scarification, 'tribal' tattooing and branding. The movement seeks inspiration from 'primitive' societies' through adoption of their communal rites and body modification techniques.

167 Klesse, C., 1999, op cit.

168 Eubanks, V., "Zones of Dither: Writing the Postmodern Body" *Body & Society* 2, 3, 1996.

> Our whole value system is about possession and status. The spiritual quality of some art works is now eclipsed by monetary worth; they have become tokens of status. I deliberately make my works of low-cost materials - monetary status goes against everything I believe in.[169]

The West's embrace of indigenous cultures, although generally well-intentioned, sometimes romanticises those cultures, something that can be offensive to the cultures in question. This romanticisation, according to Howell[170] , may be a reaction to the perceived dehumanisation in modern life. It reflects a need to move away from European models in order to develop a new sense of self.

Romanticisation of indigenous people's beliefs affects the nature of information collected and the response to 'primitive' artefacts. Djon Mundine[171] regards the over-simplified stereotype of Aboriginal people as an unrelievedly spiritual people at one with the environment, as patronising and insulting in its romanticism and a sanitised view of Aboriginality. Rasheed Aareen[172] also speaks out strongly against the romanticisation of 'spirituality' in the Third World saying: "The struggle in Third World countries is not for 'spirituality' but for independent societies, which are democratic, modern, and secular, and contemporary art produced in those countries is part of this struggle" .

The attraction to indigenous systems of belief may not always be related to spiritual need. Kirk Varndoe[173] says that the engagement with broader systems of nature, magic, ritual and social organisation is an attempt to be closer to the audience. He believes that Joseph Beuys' (1921-1986 German) performances

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169 Unger, P., "Mark Lander," *Art New Zealand* 71, 1994, pp. 81-83.

170 Howell, S., 1991, op cit, pp. 226-227.

171 Mundine, D., ""The Native Born" The Native Born: Objects and Representations from Ramingining, Arnhem Land" Eds, Rudder, J. et al, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1996, p. 91.

172 Araeen, R., "Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse," *Third Text Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture*, Vol. 6, 1989, p. 14.

173 Varnedoe, K., "Contemporary Explorations," *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, Eds, Rubin, W. S. et al, Vol. 2, Museum Of Modern Art, New York,1984, pp. 661-662.

are influenced by the organisational patterns of tribal and prehistoric society, and that Abstract Expressionists were influenced by the spirit of myth and magic rather than the forms of 'primitive' art. Mircia Eliade[174] believes that existentialism, with its feelings of estrangement and a belief in the absurdity of human existence, has contributed to people turning towards a more positive view of the mysterious, towards the 'primitive', reflecting the inadequacy in the scientific as a total outlook.

The search for the spiritual in the 'primitive' stems from the West's concerns about modern society. At worst, this is a blinkered romantic exercise and a form of cultural imperialism and appropriation. At best, it recognises that other cultures have retained important societal values that illustrate possibilities for improved systems of thought.

Cultural Imperialism and Appropriation

The West's openness and willingness to incorporate motifs from other cultures in order to redefine itself has not always been met with the same enthusiasm by Third World cultures. The West's view that appropriation within and between cultures is a basic dynamic of creativity, is not accepted as a given by others. The Third World is reconsidering its shared colonial history and is demanding that the West re-examine its attitudes in relation to it. Argument and counter argument make for a dynamic conversation, from which can emerge new insights. It will be argued that the process of cross-cultural contact, although fraught with difficulties, can yield fruitful results for both the First and Third Worlds. The key lies in engagement, navigation and negotiation, and consciousness of the others' perception, rather than closed systems which discourage and prevent exchanges.

It is useful to first examine criticisms of the West's embracement of the 'primitive' before discussing benefits which may have resulted from it. These criticisms provide an understanding of perceptions from outside the West,

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[174] Eliade, M. and Apostolos Cappadona, D., *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Art* Crossroad, New York, 1986, p. 24.

which have shaped new art forms in these regions. They also illustrate that the West is taking criticisms on board and changing its attitudes.

Some of those who are critical of the West include Torgovnick, Mosquero, Mundine and Thomas. Torgovnick[175] describes the need by the West for the 'primitive' as exploitative, as a one-way precondition and supplement for its sense of self. Gerardo Mosquero[176] says that the West demands the 'fantastic' from the Third World. Although Mosquera concurs with Torgovnick, he questions whether that need must or will always remain exploitative. He believes that the attraction for the 'primitive' or the 'other' can be a two-way exchange, saying:

> Intercultural involvement consists not only of accepting the Other in an attempt to understand him or her and to enrich myself with his or her diversity. It also implies that the Other does the same with me, problematizing my self-awareness. The cure for the Marco Polo Syndrome entails overcoming centrisms with enlightenment from a myriad of different sources.[177]

Although Mosquera regards intercultural involvement and cross-cultural exchange as valuable, he also points out potential dangers of losing cultural specifics should the process develop into complete integrated multiculturalism. He is also concerned that the two-way exchange could be skewed to the West's benefit because the 'Primitive' speaks more to the West than to other Primitives.

Thomas[178] criticises the West saying that its 'aestheticisation' of indigenous objects is a political act, because recontextualisation denies former context and the ability of the producers to perpetuate their own uses and construction of things. The West's attraction to indigenous belief systems as a desirable state of being in the 1980-90's, is regarded by Mundine[179] as being at times

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175 Torgovnick, M., 1990, op cit, p. 246.

176 Mosquera, G., "The Marco Polo Syndrome," *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture and Theory*, Eds, Araeen, R. et al, Continuum, London, New York, 2002, p. 270.

177 Ibid, p. 273.

178 Thomas, N., 1991, op cit, p. 174.

179 Mundine, D. 1996, op cit.

sympathetic, at other times exploitative. Thomas[180,181] agrees with Mundine saying that the resulting impact of cross-cultural contact was damaging, repressive, fatal and tragic in different ways and different degrees from place to place. Anna Edmundson[182] concurs with both Mundine and Thomas, stating that the influence of the West on material culture varies according to the region, the social constructs of a particular group and the extent of contact.

It is not possible to deny that the coloniser exercises power over the colonised, however, the consequences of this exercise of power need not be entirely negative. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch[183] say that one of the few saving graces of the colonial encounter was the cultural interaction produced by Western artists' enthusiasm for the 'primitive'. This has resulted in recognition of the excellence of 'primitive' forms of expression and representation.

However, enthusiasm for 'primitive' forms of expression is sometimes paired with pressure to prevent any change to these forms despite the influence of cross-cultural contact. The perception by the West that new forms are evidence of cultural decline can pressure indigenous cultures to limit their expression to what has been retained traditionally.[184] The Third World is challenging the view that it is acceptable for the West to renew itself whereas it is not acceptable for the Third World to do so. Third World artists believe that the West needs to recognise that their art traditions have always been changing, even prior to European contact. This recognition would counter the claim that Third World art forms influenced by the West are derivative and of less value artistically.

Third World artists struggle against the West's perception that authentic 'primitive' forms of expression are static and should not be changed. There is

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180 Thomas, N., 1991, op cit, p. 208.

181 Thomas, N., "Islands of History, Two Exhibitions of Torres Strait Islander Culture," *Art & Asia Pacific*, 2000, p. 28.

182 Edmundson, A. et al, *Adorned: Traditional Jewellery and Body Decoration from Australia and the Pacific* Macleay Museum University of Sydney, Sydney, 1999, p. 13.

183 Flam, J. and Deutch, M., Eds,, *Primitivism and the Twentieth-Century Art a Documentary History* University of California Press, Ltd, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2003, p. 11.

184 Thomas, N., 2000, op cit, p. 28.

often a false assumption by the West that the knowledge of 'primitive' cultures was not derived from the dynamics of contact, discourse and exchange. For instance, some Tibetan artists are striving to break free from the expectation that all their work must deal exclusively with religion. Gade (b. 1972, Tibet) , a young artist of the Gedun Choephel circle, says:

> Many outsiders have this idea that Tibetans should stick to their original culture, and shouldn't change too much. I don't think that's fair. Tibetans also have a right to try something new. You can't treat us as an exotic species that you come and look at when you have time. It's a basic tenet of Buddhist thought that everything is in a constant state of flux. Nothing will stay the same. There has to be change. It may not be the kind of change Westerners like, but it will be change that Tibetans themselves want.[185]

N. Lendon[186] argues that 'primitive' knowledge has always been sourced from several authorities: the iconic, the temporal or inherited, and the spatial or geographic. The Pacific Island community is and has always spoken to multiple audiences outside the village. These complex interactions have always been reflected in the art produced by the communities. For example, the Yolgnu's interaction with the Macassan and Indonesian sailors[187] changed the Yolgnu's cultural expression. Wuruwul sculpture has close visual and symbolic links with the Macassan carved grave post *wuramu.*[188] This influence on cultural expression concurs with Joshua Bell's[189] statement that historicity, in the context of current social relations and interactions, changes a group's world view and transforms social practices and culture.

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185 "Tibetan Artists Seek Modernity," Agence France-Presse, *The Globe and Mail* 23 August 2005.

186 Lendon, N., "Self-Consciousness and Tradition," *Art Monthly Australia* Dec-Feb,106, 1997-98.

187 The sailors came along the northern coast of Australia in search of trepang (beach cucumber).

188 Hamby, D. L., ""My Grandfather Belongs to Nayalindi..."" *Fibre Art from Elcho Island*, Ed., Hamby, D. L., School of Applied and Performing Arts, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, 1994, pp. 50-52.

189 Bell, J. A., "A New Hale for the Nation: The Centre for Hawaiin Studies, Manoa Campus, University of Hawai'i," *Pacific Art Persistence, Change and Meaning*, Eds, Herle, A. et al, Crawford House Publishing Pty Ltd, Hindmarsh:, 2002, p. 137.

Another example that Third World traditions have always been changing is illustrated by Sillitoe's[190] research of artefacts from the Wola region in the Southern Highlands region of Papua New Guinea. He discovered that they readily borrowed and modified practices and customs from their neighbours. Design motifs changed when some objects fell out of 'fashion' within the community. The value changed if the material supply was affected by imports of other materials. Some objects were substituted for others, such as, a European ceramic saucer for the shell forehead plaque. The amount of time required to make an object did not always equate with value, as time was not seen as being in short supply.

A more positive view of cross-cultural contact emphasises the desire of the coloniser and colonised to better understand the other, a process that results in additional ways of thinking. Suzi Gablik[191] argues for a move away from the Renaissance Cartesian model of dualities towards an enveloping and relational model where vision is premised on empathy rather than on mastery, where the world is a place of interaction and interconnection rather than one of detachment and separation.

Despite political, economic and technological power differentials and romanticism of 'primitive' forms and beliefs, cross-cultural contact need not always be exploitative. The cultures of both the First and third Worlds can be enriched through exchange. The West's former detached attitude towards the Third World, as merely a source for renewal, is changing into one of engagement and alliance where need and manner of interaction is being reconsidered.

Agencies and Artists: Currents and Counter-Currents

The institutional structure within which cross-cultural exchange occurs has a significant bearing on the type of art produced. In this section, the influences of the gallery system and the art market will be discussed. These institutions have

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190 Sillitoe, P., 1998,op cit, p. 552.

191 Gablik, S., *The Reenchantment of Art* Thames and Hudson, New York, N.Y., 1991, pp. 66, 99, 125.

a direct influence on some of the artists' work that will be examined in the next chapter.

In the past, the influence of historians and ethnographers were largely responsible for the interpretation and value given to indigenous objects. Chapter 2 discussed how significant objects were sometimes overlooked because their encoded meanings were not recognised. Today, agencies such as galleries and curators and the market place - dealers, buyers - have a strong influence on what constitutes 'art'.

The demand for work means that outside agencies rather than the community or the artist, often dictate what will be considered 'art'. The purchasing power of the West affects what is made. Work previously categorised as material culture becomes art culture. For instance, the making of basketry, mat-weaving and tapa-cloth by women, which Guiart[192] describes as 'minor arts', are being reassessed. Their recent display alongside the 'high arts' of painting and sculpture confirms their new status. G. McCracken[193] says that basket-making has re-emerged as a contemporary cultural practice affirming Aboriginal Ngarrindjeri identity. Basket-making crosses all aspects of life, from practical everyday usage to story-telling and myth-making. Baskets are used in ceremonial and spiritual ritual. The making and trading of these objects are 'moral' transactions that bring about and maintain human personal relationships.

192 Guiart, J., 1963, op cit, p. 2.
193 McCracken, G., "Making and Placing the Object," *Object*, 4, 2000.

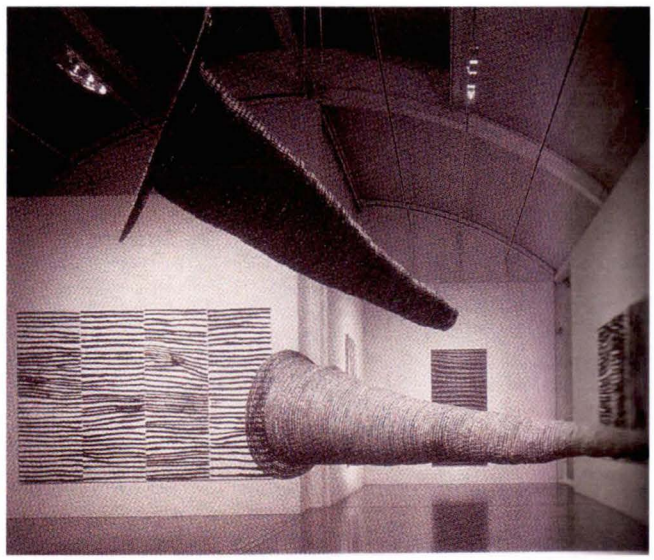

Figure 27: Yvonne Koolmatri *Eel Traps* 1996[194]
Installation view of Australian Pavillion, Venice Biennale
Woven dried sedge rushes; 56 x 99.5 x 56 cm

Ephemeral arts, women's art, utilitarian objects and dance, once not given the status of art, have since been validated by their exhibition in a gallery setting. John Slavin[195], commenting on Yvonne Koolmatri's *Eel Traps* exhibited in the 1996 Venice Biennale *Future, present, past: a labyrinth,* says that the most traditional woven work paradoxically appears the most modern in the gallery context (Figure 27). These works are appreciated for their physical structure, allegorical meanings and as representations of a culture with a different world-view. Leta Keens[196] talks about the integrative nature of *mandjabu* (Aboriginal fish traps) in the exhibition *Crossing Country*, saying that the fish were regarded as the souls of the unborn and the traps were regarded as wombs. Such narratives evoke multi-layered meanings, reflecting the difficulty of separating aesthetic qualities from association with everyday life, belief and landscape. The functional aspect of an object need not overshadow its metaphorical and spiritual value.

The status of galleries, given their purchasing power and their intermediary role with the market place, has meant that changes preferred by them often

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194 Slavin, J., "Notes Towards the End of Time The Venice Biennale," *Art Monthly Australia* 102, 1997.

195 Slavin, J., 1997, op cit, p. 10.

196 Keens, L., "Contemporary Meets Customary at a Sydney Exhibition of Arnhem Land," *Qantas* 2004.

become part of the indigenous repertoire as, for example, in Lola Greeno's work, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Philip Dark[197] believes that the world of dealers has a strong influence on public taste and can misdirect and misinform it. Galleries, in seeking to make indigenous art more understandable to Western viewers, also introduce changes, in relation to narrative and secular elements.

Market value for non-Western art is improved if a story is attributed to it. Campbell [198] comments that sometimes there is a genuine story; sometimes the story is recreated, sometimes the stories have been forgotten and sometimes there may not be a story. Sillitoe[199] says that the origin of some designs used in the Highlands of PNG are unknown and may have no meaning in themselves apart from enabling identification of one's possessions. The imagery cannot always be explained but it functions as non-verbal communication ensuring its continued use. Ure Eickelkamp[200] who helped artists, mainly women, record information about Aboriginal Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara designs used in the Ernabella craftrooms in South Australia, notes that several do not have a narrative. Artist Tjikalyi Tjapiya says that the design associated with her community is not a narrative or topical one. Lucy Lester says: "But many people ask, 'What's the story, what does it mean?', and we say, 'Just designs, I'll be doing a design. There is this colour I like...'"

For other artists, however, the narrative is not to be dismissed and is a way of rediscovering identity. Cochrane[201] says that many contemporary Pacific artists are concerned with reclaiming their culture. They are rediscovering mythologies and traditional narratives. They become an essential part of their identity and a way of filtering new values. Pacific cultural identity is being developed through encoding and recreation of long lost symbols and motifs in

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197 Dark, P. J. C., "Persistence, Change and Meaning in Pacific Art: A Retrospective View with an Eye Towards the Future," *Pacific Art Persistence, Change and Meaning*, Eds, Herle, A. et al, Crawford House Publishing Pty Ltd, Hindmarsh, 2002, p. 18.

198 Campbell, S., 2002, op cit, pp. 167-173.

199 Sillitoe, P., 1998, op cit, pp. 551, 554.

200 Eickelkamp, U., *"Don't Ask for Stories ... " : The Women from Ernabella and Their Art = "Tjukurpa Tjapintja Wiya ..." : Minyma an Apalanya Ngurara Tjutangku Warka Palyantja Craftroomangka*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1999, pp. ix, 60.

201 Cochrane, S., 2001, op cit, p. 75.

new forms. This has stimulated interest in recovering knowledge of the past and its safeguarding. This can be seen particularly in the work of Sofia Tekela-Smith and Niki Hastings-McFall as discussed in the next chapter.

The West's preference for narrative sits alongside a preference for certain art mediums. Galleries promote a hierarchy of art mediums, particularly painting and sculpture, thereby influencing art expression. Eickelkamp[202] notes that sand drawings and leaves used as characters in Aboriginal Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara stories about life in the community have been transferred to canvas and sculpture. Regina Wilson[203] (b. 1945, Aboriginal), a Ngangikurrunggurr woman, who makes nets, bags, mats, and baskets has transferred the woven motif to painting, as in *Syaw - Fish Net* 2002, exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney in the exhibition *Maningrida Weaving, Carried Lightly and Spinifex Runner* (Figures 28 and 29).

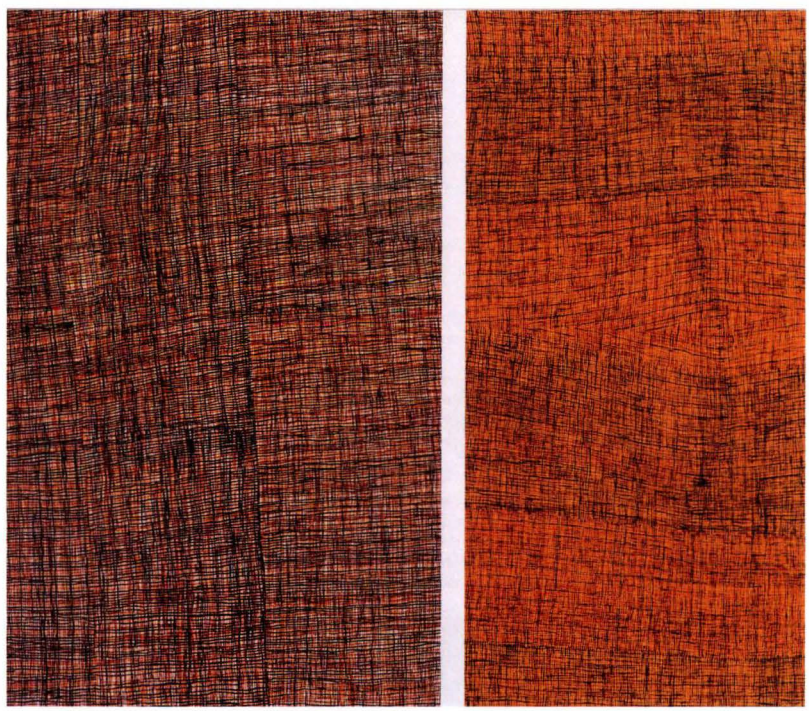

Figure 28 (left): Regina Wilson *Syaw - Fish Net* 2002 [204]
Acrylic on linen; dimensions unknown
Figure 29 (right): Regina Wilson *Syaw – Fish Net* 2003[205]
Acrylic on linen; dimensions unknown

202 Op cit, Eickelkamp, U., 1999, pp. 24,51.
203 Moon, D. and McDougall, K., "Peppimenarti Artist Regina Wilson," *Object*, 43, 2004, pp. 38-39.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.

Another work in which the original medium has been transferred to painting is Witiji *(Hair String)* 1997 by Maggie Napangardi Watson (c. 1921- 2004, Aboriginal) (Figure 30). She was one of the senior Warlpiri women at Yuendumu. She was a driving force behind the community's early experiments in canvas, where women's ceremonial designs were rendered in new materials. *Witiji (Hair String)* refers to the hair string headband decorated with bandicoot tail feathers, which was made by the ancestral goanna for the women.[206] The design and form have been translated into the painting medium. Awareness of galleries' medium preferences is illustrated in the work of Niki Hastings-McFall, to be discussed in the next chapter.

Figure 30: Maggie Napangardi Watson *Witiji (Hair String)* 1997[207]
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas; 365 x 183 cm

Gallery influence on medium also extends to ways of working, away from the collective towards the individual. Dark[208] expresses concern about the West's influence over the Third World in relation to collective working for the purposes of identity as opposed to the individual separateness of Western

206 Ryan, J., Ed., *Colour Power: Aboriginal Art Post 1984* National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2004, p. 159.
207 Ibid, p. 32.
208 Dark, P. J. C., 2002, op cit, p. 26.

culture. The retention of communal attitudes is reflected in the Vanuatu cultural space where design copyright is owned by the clan. There is an exchange network with associated obligations, where exchanges are regulated. These communal attitudes are the 'cultural glue' of the community with implications for trademark and copyright in relation to their art. Sillitoe[209] too speaks of transactable wealth in ceremonial exchanges in PNG as the 'social glue' necessary for stability and interaction.

Increasingly, there have been challenges to the dominance of Western institutions in defining what constitutes art. For instance, Cochrane[210] says the Tjibaou Cultural Centre opened in 1998 in Noumea New Caledonia reflects how the islanders are using art as an act of self-determination, as a place where the stereotypes of Pacific art, tourist art and craft are negotiated. Artists from remote locations add vitality to local culture; metropolitan artists are exposed to the international art scene. Cross-cultural influences are encountered through introspection and experimentation.

Within some countries, there is, in addition, the challenge about who has the right to speak for the country artistically. Pacific regions have entangled histories where different racial groups share the same country. For instance, New Caledonia is made up of several communities, Kanks, immigrants from European and Asia and island born. Cochrane[211] notes that here some non-indigenous artists feel marginalised because of the fear that they will again dominate the cultural space that indigenous artists feel they have just gained. The situation needs time to resolve itself.

As Third World artists take control over their arts and how they will interact with the West, so too is the West reconsidering how they regard their art. Welsch[212] concurs that diverse interpretative frames may be more useful for the understanding of objects made in the Pacific. He lists a number of interpretive frames: the physical structure; the time of collection vs the time of viewing; the

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209 Sillitoe, op cit, p., 1998.
210 Cochrane, S., op cit, 2001
211 Ibid, pp. 43-46, 78, 142.
212 Welsch, R. L., 2002, op cit, p. 6.

aesthetic dimension in its original context and newer context; the ownership value to the original community and to the recent owner/collector/museum; the power relations between collector and community of origin and the ability to appropriate meanings for one's own ends. Dark[213] also recognises the need for a comparative perspective in cross-cultural research saying that a search for absolute values can be a chimera.

Turbulence: Stimulation and/or Threat

The relationships between artists' journeys and their art have been changed as a consequence of their displacements, migration, or exile. Many artists, today, are of mixed heritage and/or work abroad rather than in their countries of origin. Nikos Papastergiadis[214] uses the word 'turbulence' to explain is a way of rethinking the process of complex interaction as it affects the individual and social relationships in the modern world. Tensions exist in this dynamic environment, but for the most part, they catalyse creative expression rather than constrain it. Diverse responses have re-defined the notion of 'art' and illustrate openness to alterior systems of thought and expression. Art expression is increasingly influenced by cross-cultural contact.

Michael Heizer believes that today's art reflects both the high-tech and the 'primitive'. He says: "We live in a schizophrenic period. We're living in a world that's technological and primordial simultaneously. I guess the idea is to make art which reflects this premise."[215] Lippard[216] states that the products and technology of the West have contributed to the complex creolisation[217] of the

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213 Stanley, N., "Museums and Indigenous Identity: Asmat Carving in a Global Context," *Pacific Art Persistence, Change and Meaning*, Eds, Herle, A. et al, Crawford House Publishing Pty Ltd, Hindmarsh, 2002, p. 163.

214 Papastergiadis, N., "Faith without Certitudes," *Hope - New Philosophies for Change*, Ed., Zournazi, M., Pluto Press Australia, Annadale, 2002, pp. 79-86.

215 Flam, J., and Deutch, M., 2003, Michael Heizer 1991, op cit, Coda: Quotations from artists and writers, p. 432.

216 Lippard, L., 2003, op cit, p. 405.

217 Different words have been applied to these cultural changes such as metissage, hybridity, creolisation and syncretism. There does not seem to be any agreement on the exact nature of these terms. The development of these terms indicates a desire to acknowledge and label the change from outside influences. Cochrane regards metissage in the Pacific as a blending of heritage where elements of spirituality, orality, performance, self-adornments and other beliefs and customs of the people are incorporated with Western sources, influences and products and attitudes. The overlapping and the degree of overlap differ from person to person. (Cochrane, S.,

Third World. Cross-cultural exchanges, transexperience, often result in hybrid art forms.

Hybrid forms can lack the depth of either culture. The work *Headless (mfg Self)* 2000 of Michael Joo (b. 1966, USA of Korean parentage) illustrates the concern some artists have about hybrid forms (Figure 31). *Headless (mfg Self)* is constructed of an army of earthen coloured polyurethane Buddha statues whose heads have been replaced with characters from popular Western culture, such as GI Joe and the Green Giant. For Joo, the headless statues are a metaphor for the psychic incompleteness or identity crisis, experienced by those who are not white. Doryun Chong[218] says that this work illustrates that hybridity can result in the loss of the essence of both cultures, rather than being a remedy against the ills of purism and universalism.

Figure 31: Michel Joo *Headless (mfg Self)* 2000[219]
Cast polyurethane foam, plastic styrene, wire; dimensions variable

A similar concern about the hybrid forms was expressed by Midori Yoshimoto in relation to a Buddhist exhibition in the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New

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Beretara Contemporary Pacific Art Halsread Press, Rushcutters Bay NSW, 2001.)Lemke regards the vital hybrid in which black and white cultures in USA form something new or hybrid similar to Francoise Lionnet's metissage. He believes metissage is different from creolisation because the original culturally specific identities are no longer discernible. Lemke argues that there can be no modernism without primitivism. Modernism includes the presence of the Primitive at its heart. Syncretism is an attempt to reconcile and blend various influences. (Lemke, S. "Primitivist Modernism 1998" op cit; Flam, J. and Deutch, M., op cit, 2003, pp. 409-413)

218 Chong, D., "Korean American Views on Exile, Travel and Unbelonging," *Art Asia Pacific* 29, 2001.

219 Ibid, p. 28.

York 2003. He described the exhibition, which included works which used a range of ready made materials such as plastic buddhas, as 'Buddhist Pop Art'. The viewer, initially amused, increasingly feels dismay and emptiness with longer exposure to the work.[220] Hybridity or rhizomous thinking can suffer from a lack of depth, a lack of rootedness in any particular culture.

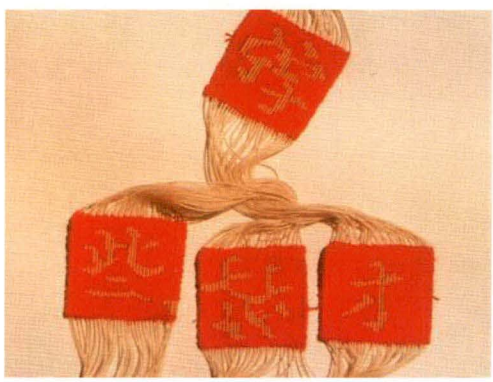

Figure 32: Hanh Ngo *Stringing Sentences,* 1996[221]
Detail, cotton, rayon; dimensions unknown

'Transexperience', the result of displacement, can be difficult. Hanh Ngo (b. 1971, Vietnam)[222], a refugee, arrived in Australia without papers. She negotiates cross-cultural influences; her work expresses the effort required to come to terms with 'in-betweeness'. Her work, *Stringing Sentences,* consists of textile embroidered badges woven badges with text; the badges are entangled and have 'unfinished' or loose ends (Figure 32). Ngo combines the idea of rank badges, which Vietnamese use to identify successful candidates, and text from *The Tale of Kieu.* The tale is an 18th century folk epic which evokes the feminine virtues of endurance and resilience. The ordered, prescriptive, time-consuming and repetitive process of weaving reflects her difficulty in learning a new language. The intertwined section of threads reflects cross-cultural influences. The loose ends indicate her continuing negotiation in relation to identity. Like the character in the tale, she has endurance and resilience to reshape her identity. The reinterpreted and recontextualised rank badges,

220 Yoshimoto, M., "Commodification of Buddhism at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York," *Art Asia Pacific* 38, Fall, 2003.

221 Murray Cree, L., "Cross-Cultural Translation Hanh Ngo and 'Being Vietnamese'," *Art Asia Pacific*, 32, 2001.

222 Ibid.

whose original purpose was to identify successful candidates, have become her official papers indicating a degree of success in cross-cultural negotiation.

The difficulties inherent in hybridisation however should not lead us to overlook its positive potentialities. This is something of which the curator, Melissa Chui, is mindful. She[223] considers that hybridisation reflects Australia's rich melange of cultures. The artists[224] in the 1999 exhibition *Bright and Shining*, had different cultural origins. They meshed aspects of various spiritual and/or world views. The significance of the exhibition, for Chui, lay in the universality that transcended ethnic backgrounds and could appeal to any individual. The desire for dialogue, two-way exchange and collaboration is illustrated in the many exhibitions[225] that have taken place throughout the world in recent times.

Some artists see hybridity as being celebratory about creole or hybrid forms that express the dynamic nature of transcultural experience. For instance, in New Zealand, a growing number of Islanders see themselves as Polynesian while at the same time selectively absorbing transcultural experiences into their sense of identity. Polynisation is a word coined by Jim Vivieare. He says that the reappropriation of Polynesian ideas and values by Polynesians and the endless possibilities presented by multi-transactions, reflect and encourage the vitality of the Polynisation artistic movement. Traditions enable the bridging of the past to the present.[226] These multi-transactions are evident in the work of Hastings-McFall, whose work will be discussed in the next chapter.

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223 Johnson, T. et al, *Bright and Shining* Asian Australian Artists Association Inc., Sydney, 1999.

224 Artists included Tim Johnson, Lindy Lee, Victoria Lobregat, and Natsuho Takita at Australian Embassy Tokyo by Gallery 4A Asian Australian Artists Association, Sydney.

225 Some examples are: 1984, Te Maori, an exhibition of traditional Maori art and artefacts at the MOMA; 1988, ART/Artefact curated by Susan Vogel; 1988, Stone, Bone & Shell exhibition from NZ toured Australia in craft based on Maori carving traditions; 1991, Pacific Parallels: Artists and the landscape in New Zealand an exhibition of contemporary and historical NZ landscape art touring USA; 1992, establishment of Art Biennale in Noumea; 1993, Asia- Pacific Triennial in QAG; 2001, Bright Paradise, the first Auckland Triennial; 2003, Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific artists from NZ, Torres Strait islands, Fiji, New Caledonia, Samoa, Hawaii, Rotuma and Nuie.

226 Stevenson, K., "The Island in the Urban: Contemporary Pacific Art in New Zealand," *Pacific Art Persistence, Change and Meaning*, Eds, Herle, A. et al, Crawford House Publishing Pty Ltd, Hindmarsh, 2002, p. 414.

The view that contemporary Pacific art is hybridising and full of vitality is supported by Edmundson.[227] She says that contemporary art in the Oceanic region, drawn from traditional and Western derived media, expresses ongoing cultural ideologies and identities. It represents the continued power of the indigenous cultures of the Oceanic region and their artistry.

The Possibility of Pluralistic Societies

Entangled contemporary experience requires new modes of thinking which transcend the dualistic. Thinking limited to dualities and dichotomies can be paralytic. Peter Brunt[228] says the relationship between the sociality of ritual and the apparatus of modern visuality is more complex than any dichotomous opposition can subsume. A new paradigm, 'Empire', proposed by Michael Hardt [229] is a paradigm capable of transcending dualities. It is a place of no power, both nowhere and everywhere, an *ou-tupia* or *non-place* free of modern boundaries, criss-crossed by so many fault lines that it appears as a uniform whole. It is a rhizome model, non-centred and non-hierarchical, an 'Empire' exercising restraint so that a Counter-Empire does not occur. Hardt's use of the word 'Empire' is confusing because of its association with colonisation. Hardt's 'Empire' is similar to Eliade's[230] notion of transcendence, defined as a fundamental human instinct that frees one from individuality to experience universality but universality expressed in localised cultural specifics.

The concentration on Eurocentric dualisms, according to Torgovnic [231] results in missed opportunities to preserve alternate value systems and re-evaluate basic Western conceptions from the viewpoint of systems of thought outside of or aslant from those of the West. Torgovnic's 'dialogic' model, where alternative visions depend on openness to alternative conceptions of knowledge

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227 Edmundson, A., et al 1999, op cit, p. 15.

228 Brunt, P., "Clumsy Utopians: An Afterword.," *Double Vision Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*, Ed., Losche, N. T. a. D., Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Cambridge, 1999, p. 267.

229 Hardt, M. and Negri, A., *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2000, pp. 190, 299-300.

230 Eliade, M. and Apostolos Cappadona, D., 1986, op cit, p. xii.

231 Torgovnick, M., 1990, op cit, pp. 83, 247.

and social reality, may be the ideal pluralistic society. However, a pluralistic society, based on openness and liberalism, is a challenging and difficult one to maintain. A pluralistic society has many sensitivities, some of which are antagonistic to alternative value systems. Some belief systems will not have 'respect of other systems of belief' at the core of their structure and will be against the existence of other beliefs and forbid engagement with them.

An open system of exchange, characterised by a respect for the cultures with which one exchanges, is preferable to a closed system, where exchange is not encouraged and possible. The destruction or suppression of one group's world/religious view by another in the past has spurred some of the most powerful and challenging visual expressions in the present day. Cross- cultural contact, with the resultant entangled histories, interaction and exchange, has forced artists to negotiate and navigate their positions, particularly in relation to agencies such as galleries and the market place. These influences require artists to grapple with issues of cultural imperialism, appropriation and derivation. The next chapter will discuss examples of contemporary art that are influenced by 'stringed things' of belief and cross-cultural contact.

Chapter 4

The Response by Contemporary Artists to 'Stringed Things' of Belief

The purpose of this chapter is to address the central question of this research: *"How do contemporary artists draw upon traditional 'stringed things' of belief?*

The reference to 'stringed things' by contemporary artists is particularly apt as a metaphor for expressing a hybrid identity. Whereas traditionally, string was a metaphor for 'connectedness' representing the ties that bound a community together, in the contemporary context, it has become a way of expressing links and negotiations of identity across cultures.

The examination of contemporary art will begin with works that most closely echo traditional forms, and then will proceed with works that recontextualise, alter and/or extend the physical structures, concepts and meanings. The chapter will close with a discussion of trends. The significance of this chapter is that it gathers a wide range of contemporary responses and juxtaposes them to illustrate the influence of traditional 'stringed things'.

Parameters for the selection of contemporary work

This study is limited to contemporary artists who source traditional 'stringed things' and employ string as part of their practice. The selected contemporary artists need not work exclusively in string. As stated in the introduction, the term 'stringed things', as used in this study, is loose in definition and incorporates a range of stringed material, both natural and synthetic, to which may be attached a range of objects (beads, shells, feathers, paper, plastic, and light bulbs). Emphasis is on artists of the Pacific rim . This selection was made because this is the region in which the researcher is based and because the artists and their work were therefore more easily accessible. Information was

sourced from the literature, exhibitions and through contact and interaction with members of religious and indigenous groups, museum curators, historians, academics, artists and those with knowledge or access to knowledge in relation to 'stringed things' (Appendices I & II). A limited number of works have been chosen to exemplify the diversity of response rather than the presentation of an extensive encyclopaedic view. The discussion will be elastic and encompassing rather than constraining, reflecting multi-layered interpretations.

Contemporary Work

Contemporary artists, who most closely echo and replicate the traditional, continue to construct 'stringed things' meant to be worn on the body. Difficulties related to the study of traditional objects, such as historical bias, inaccessibility and silence, are often the driving force behind contemporary artistic reinterpretation. Culturally significant material and traditional structure are used to evoke the knowledge/value systems, obligations and multi-level meanings associated with a particular world view. Although these contemporary works are constructed to be worn on the body, many are also displayed in gallery and/or performance contexts rather than in the original context. The structured secular gallery context is often essential to convey the added and layered meanings. The manner of display is critical.

Figure 33: Mabia and her beaded necklace[232]

232 Photograph by Therese Mulford

An example of a person working in the traditional way is Ajak Mabia (Sudanese). Her beaded necklace may arguably not be regarded as 'gallery art' (Figure 33). It has been included because it illustrates the influence of the artist's intention and the agency of the gallery. This influence is made particularly apparent when Mabia's work is contrasted with that of Sofia Tekela-Smith and Niki Hastings-McFall.[233] Sudan refugee, Mabia, personifies the negotiation required for self-redefinition in 'turbulent' times. The stringed necklace reflects her identity and country of origin. The multi-stranded blue and red plastic bead necklace is arranged to make circular and radiating patterns. Previous years as a refugee dislocated Mabia from her traditions. In relation to her effort of stringing beads and to her loss of traditional knowledge, Mabia says:

> It's very important for a Dinka girl; they have to wear their beads from when they're ten onwards. When I was little I used to watch them doing a lot of this, so I have idea. I have a picture in my mind, but I can't put it exactly. I can design in mind, but I need support from the people who know the colours. I can't remember all the colours, so I need someone to help make it. This is my own -- I create this pattern, what I remember is the same, but the colours I'm not sure if I've got that right or not. [234]

The making of the necklace, despite the fact that the colour codes may no longer be 'correct', is important as a reminder of heritage, identity and value systems. Her necklace continues the narrative from her place of birth, although its structure is now altered.

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233 Refer to the discussion that follows Mabia's work about Hastings-McFall and Tekela-Smith.

234 Mulford, T., *Interview with Ajak Mabia: Beads as Used by a Refugee from Sudan* Hobart, 2004.

Figure 34: Mabia performing[235]

In Tasmania, Mabia is a singer who wears traditional costume with beads when performing (Figure 34). When interviewed and photographed in street clothes (Figure 33), she apologised for not being dressed to suit her beads. Beads based on traditional design and western street clothes were not compatible. The narrative of her 'stringed things', in the entertainment context, presents a sense of the exotic and unknown, whereas, in contrast, a gallery context would invite the viewer to decode its meanings.

In contrast, the work of Greeno and Tekela-Smith demands a different response because of different intention, context and audience. These artists, unlike Mabia, focus on their heritage to make statements that invite and sometimes demand that the viewer reconsider what they are looking at.

Lola Greeno (b. 1946, Aboriginal), a Tasmanian Aboriginal artist, makes stringed necklaces that remain close to those in traditional Aboriginal culture. However some of her works have entered the gallery context where their meanings have changed. For Greeno, shell necklaces represent traditions and cultural identity, which have been passed down generationally (Figure 355). Some of the traditions and ways of making are closely guarded secrets with strict rules associated with the practice. Greeno respects and works within this tradition. Secrecy and restrictive making maintain the special quality of the shell necklaces and send strong signals to those outside the culture and demand respect.

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235 Photograph by Therese Mulford

Figure 35: Lola Greeno *Maireener* 2003[236]
Shells, cotton; dimensions unknown

Greeno makes necklaces from a range of small shells that she collects, cleans, and strings with upholstery thread. The selection of the shells and the structure and arrangement of them are sometimes dependent on tradition, sometimes dictated by a desired effect. New materials, such as upholstery thread and metal clasps, are substituted for traditional sinew. The necklaces are encoded with meaning, representing the region of collection, the time cycle appropriate to collection and the communal exercise of collecting. The process of making the 'stringed things' is one of interaction and significance, providing a connection with history, tradition and community. When working, Greeno says: "We talk all the time. You would find with every person working together, there's always the other stories to go with it that you may remember about what Mum said and whatever."[237]

Greeno's work celebrates and promotes awareness of the tradition of shell necklaces. She is a bridge between cultures, presenting her work to the wider community so that it may be appreciated and respected. The necklaces do not refer to other cultures; rather they are protective of the culture from which they are derived.

However, Greeno extends the parameters of tradition, altering the structure in terms of length and design, maintaining traditional meanings but also adding

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236 *Photograph: Peter Whyte.*

237 Mulford, T., *Interview with Lola Greeno: Tasmanian Aboriginal Shell Necklaces* Launceston, 2004.

and expanding meanings to reinforce Aboriginal identity. For example, elements of language and myth are incorporated in a necklace that relates to the Cape Barren Goose, a bird from her island of birth. She says:

> With the Cape Barron Goose one, it ended up being a grey from what we call the gulf shells, the orange was the orange oat shells that represent its leg and then there was some white cockles because he's got sort of a white tip on his wing and the black crow shells were used because he's got black feet and I think black on his beak. So that made a very interesting little necklace.[238]

Naming and story/myth association add more meaning. Greeno says:

> There's all these elders that have gone with all these stories and only little snippets of our history is recorded from our elders, but I guess now, people are very serious about putting...constructing their necklaces and their stories and the language together...if we can put these together as a package I think that we now have a much richer story and culture to pass onto our younger generation as well.[239]

For Greeno, the making of the necklaces reinforces the cultural glue which defines members of her group. They continue and extend the traditional narrative. However, despite being strongly steeped in tradition, Lola's shell necklaces are increasingly gallery pieces. Their naming through title and their association with story transform them from material culture into art objects. Her shell necklaces sit in that space between art and craft, sometimes one and sometimes the other depending on their context. Their display in a gallery, a space which invites certain perceptual and conceptual constructs, influences viewer response. In this way, Greeno's necklaces differ from Mabia's.

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238 Ibid.
239 Ibid.

Figure 36: Lola [Sainty] Greeno *The 10...Plan* 1998[240]
Wood, fibre, sand, bone, shell, ochre; 10 fibre balls
10 boxes from 44 x 32 x 4 cm to 18 x 14 x 4 cm

A recent work, *The 10...Plan*, by Greeno departs from the wearable shell necklace form into sculptural form (Figure 36). It presents a political message about identity, land rights and the law. The work is constructed of shells, fibre, sand from Northeast Tasmania, muttonbird feathers, kangaroo bones and ochre. She says: "These fibre offerings speak for the basic rights of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to negotiate their land claims, and maintain their heritage in a culturally appropriate ways".[241] This work illustrates a trend for artists to move away from the wearable to the sculptural and 2-D forms, forms that are more favoured in the gallery art context – a trend that will be elucidated further through the examination of other artists' work.

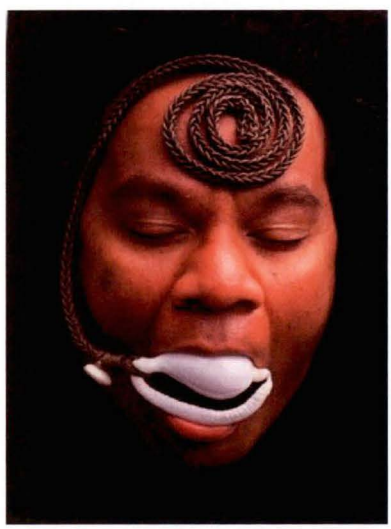
In contrast to both Mabia and Greeno, Sofia Tekela-Smith (b. 1970, New Zealand father, Rotuman mother) recontextualises the narrative in relation to her body adornments to negotiate identity. Tekela-Smith, a New Zealand artist of Scottish and Totuma heritage, references traditional shell, jade, flowers, string and the process of twining in her body adornments. She fuses cultural and personal symbols to negotiate her identity and to critique Western stereotypes of that identity. She redefines original meaning by careful

240 Winter, J. G., *Native Title Business Contemporary Indigenous Art* Keeaira Press Brisbane, Southport, 2002, p. 46.

241 Ibid.

placement in a contemporary context. Some of her body adornment pieces are photographed being 'worn' by people she knows. These photographs, in particular, move narrative into enquiry and discourse. The enquiry and discourse revolves around general issues, relating to Western perception of Pacific culture and people, as well as deeply personal issues, relating to Tekela-Smith's heritage and family relationships. The search for identity is bound up with the re-examination of body adornment associated with systems of belief. This renewed interest in body adornment is related to the history of colonisation and missionisation. Viewers are encouraged to regard the objects aesthetically, but also to question their meaning and the source of that meaning.

Savage Man with Pure (Figure 37) is a large scale photograph of Tekela-Smith's husband, John Pule, with eyes closed, holding a cowrie shell (a pure) in his mouth. The attached cord spirals clockwise on his forehead. Part of the title of the work, *Savage Man*, demands viewer reconsideration. Tekela-Smith critiques Western stereotypes of Pacific identity. The large scale of the image is powerful visually; it challenges and paradoxically reinforces the stereotyped image of savage male identity.



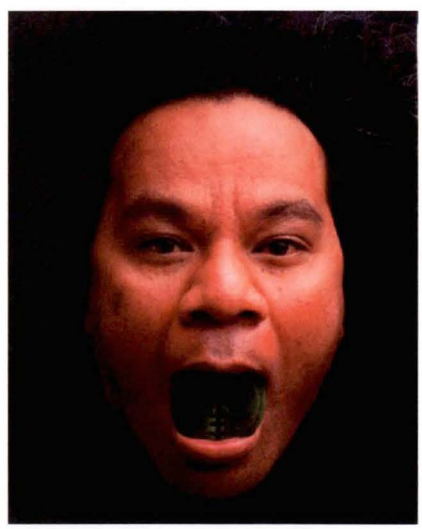


Figure 37 (left): Sofia Tekela-Smith *Savage Island Man with Pure* 2003
Photograph 1700 x 1300 edition of 8
Figure 38 (right): Sofia Tekela-Smith *Savage Island Man with Pounamu* 2003
Photograph 1700 x 1300 edition of 8

The word Pure (pronounced poolay) is a play on the name of the shell and the sound of Tekela-Smith's husband's surname, Pule, inviting multiple readings.

Her original intention with the photograph was to satisfy a request to archive her work 'properly'. She says:

> I was thinking of a way to present my jewellery in what I thought was an interesting way. I didn't want the work to be just put on the floor or on a table and photographed and put into a catalogue. I'm interested in how the work can be performed. So basically, that's how that work came about, was my wanting to present my work a little bit different than the norm and then it happened.[242]

The body adornment piece, *Savage Man with Pure*, is made of a large cowrie shell attached to an eight plait cord; a smaller cowrie shell acts as a lug to secure the string. The shells have important cultural and personal meanings. Cultural meanings relate to fertility, femininity and the stories that the old people have told her about the shells and how some are considered sacred. Personal meanings include a love of the shape of the shell "like a turtle" as well as other cultural and family associations. Tekela-Smith says:

> ...in the old days when you wore the cowry shell, you had to wear it basically depending on what they call an initiated woman -- a married woman -- or whether you were a virgin, and if you were a virgin you had to wear the cowry shell necklace with this opening facing your body. And when you were married then you could wear it outside and so people could look at what you were wearing. The little shell is another cowry shell, but that's a very common shell and, why I work with shell a lot was because when I was little and my grandmother used to carry me on her back from village to village; we'd walk along the beach and I'd collect things as we walked along. It has special associations with me.[243]

The shell's traditional meanings of female fertility and marriage signifier are accentuated by the placement of the shell in her partner's mouth, a gesture of intimacy. The placing of the shell in the mouth also suggests a silencing and

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242 Mulford, T., *Interview with Sofia Tekela-Smith, Artist* Greyland, Auckland, 2005.
243 Ibid.

paradoxically its converse, revelation, because the shape of the shell opening is similar to that of an open mouth.

The cord has broader cultural significance. Pacific canoes and houses are traditionally constructed without nails using eight-plaited ropes of flax or coconut fibre. The spiral and its direction are deliberate. "That's the way that you would accept good feeling and if the spiral went the other way then it's the dark side of the earth."[244] The spiral also suggests the Maori Koru design of the uncurling native fern fronds, which represents peace, tranquillity, personal growth, positive change and awakening, new life and harmony. The plait is sometimes referred to as Maui's plait. Tekela-Smith explains:

> Maui the trickster -- Maui the guy who fished up New Zealand. The Maui, for God, decided that the days were too short and the nights were too long, he wanted to slow the sun's journey across the skies down so he got some flax and plaited it into eight plaits and snared the sun and slowed the sun down, so that we would have the days as long as they are now.[245]

Tekela-Smith further explains the meaning of the closed eyes:

> ...always as a departure point of any of our work is colonisation. Where we've been, where we're coming from and with his eyes closed he could -- there's all sorts of scenarios possible, but one of the things is that he thinking about -- John left Niue when he was two --- what life could've been like for him if he stayed on the island and then come to New Zealand as an adult, which is what I had done.[246]

The overall impact of the work is of a physically strong self-confident Pacific Island man in a contemplative posture. The horizontality of the shell and its opening, the soft curving spiral of the cord and the closed eyes all contribute to the calm meditative feeling of the work.

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244 Ibid.
245 Ibid.
246 Ibid.

The viewing of the work with eyes closed is less challenging than the one with eyes open. *Savage Island Man With Poumanu* (Figure 38) uses one of Pule's designs on prestigious greenstone, a material that is culturally significant. The encoded meaning of the design is personal, linking meaning past and present. Tekela-Smith made the greenstone necklace as a gift for her husband on his fortieth birthday, using the symbol that Pule had designed for their family. She says:

> ...it's a circle which represents the world or the moon or the sun and there's a little moon or a sun and this is a symbol of unity. This is like a seed when it's sprouting. I had this tattooed on my scalp. This is a pole that holds up everything around us and this is us and our children and what's to come. It's basically love, faith and friendship and unity, this family symbol that we've taken on as our family symbol and it's one of his works from a long time ago. That's one of my most favourite images probably of all time and I wanted him to wear it in his mouth with his eyes open, with the green stone which represents where we are and where we're living in New Zealand.[247]

In this work, Pule's direct gaze demands a different engagement from the viewer. Any rejection of the gaze by the viewer reinforces the power of the image. In contrast to *Pure*, *Poumanu* has more vertical emphasis, with the upright lines of the greenstone design, the facial lines around the mouth and between the eyes. The image is more charged, less contemplative than the work with the eyes open. The direct and confident gaze returns the viewer's gaze, reinforcing the charged alert feeling of the work.

The response to these iconic images has been strong. This is a little surprising to the artist. She says: "You can go 'Oh maybe that's what that means?' But basically-- for me it was 'This is a person that I know and this is how I wanted my work to look like.' and he agreed for me to do this thing. So it's not that mystical."[248] Irrespective of Tekela-Smith's intention, the work has taken a life of its own, with many layers of meaning and multiple interpretations. It has

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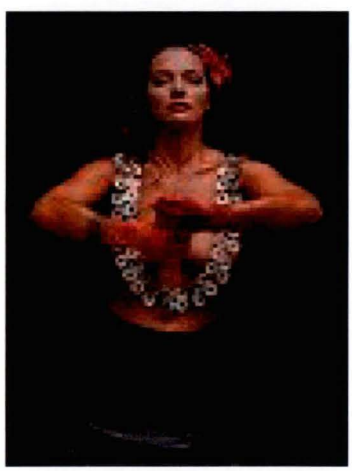
247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.

become a triple work of art: Pule's design on the pounamu, the necklace as body adornment and the contextualised photograph as a 2-D image.

Tekela-Smith addresses female as well as male stereotypes of Pacific identity through the photographic contextualisation of her body adornment pieces. Like the *Savage Man* photographs, they too challenge and paradoxically reinforce those stereotypes. The four photographs of women wearing body adornments, part of a series *Brown Eyes Blue* (Figures 39-42), illustrate how Western and Island inspirations and entangled histories coincide and collide. The series title, *Brown Eyes Blue*, is sourced from a song by Crystal Gale, whereas the titles of the individual pieces are sourced from John Pule's writings, reflecting Tekela-Smith cultural 'in-betweeness'.



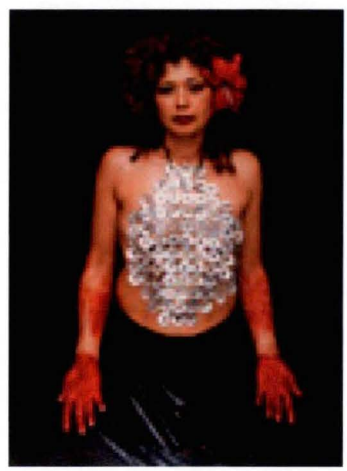


Figure 39 (left): Sofia Tekela-Smith *Your face contains matters of pure aesthetics* 2004
Series: Brown Eyes Blue[249]; Photograph 1700 x 1300 edition of 8
Figure 40 (right): Sofia Tekela-Smith *You are like a mountain capable of building palaces* 2004
Series: Brown Eyes Blue[250]; Photograph 1700 x 1300 edition of 8

249 Image www.martinbrownefineart.com/ NewZealandEx.htm 31 Oct 2005. This is a ceremonial move from the cava ceremony. The hands bring the coconut up from inside the cava bowl and squeeze the cava back into the bowl. The scale of the images is 1.7 by 1.2/1.3m.depending on the print.

250 Image: http://www.bartleyneesgallery.co.nz/artists, 13 Dec 2005. Tekela-Smith says the model placed her hands in this position to interpret her vision. She regards the pose as Jesus-like.

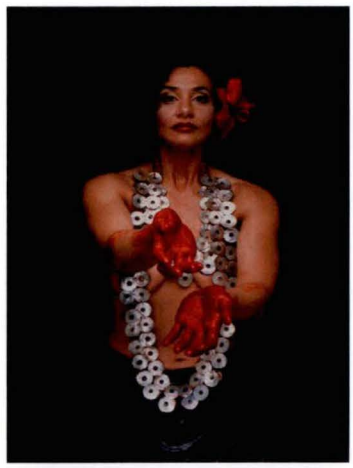


Figure 41: Sofia Tekela-Smith *Your hand is a portrait of a landscape coming into my heart* 2004; Series: Brown Eyes Blue[251]; Photograph 1700 x 1300 edition of 8
Figure 42: Sofia Tekela-Smith *Enhanced by the fragrances of your presence* 2004 Series: Brown Eyes Blue[252]; Photograph 1700 x 1300 edition of 8

She explains the series title:

> *Brown Eyes Blue* is a song by Crystal Gale -- *Don't You Make My Brown Eyes Blue* -- when I first came to New Zealand and my parents had a black and white TV. One of the first things I ever saw on tele was an old black and white movie with Billie Holiday, which I really loved and also I remember seeing a video of some kind of concert where Crystal Gale actually sang. I just was mesmerised by her when she sang the song *Don't You Make My Brown Eyes Blue.* And I loved her because she had the most beautiful blue eyes and she had long hair right down to her knees and it was this -- as a young person coming to a new culture and learning to speak English so I could barely understand what she was singing about, but I've kind of always kept that image in my mind.[253]

In addition to entangled Western and island influences, the general and the personal are also combined. The traditional materials from which the adornments are made refer to the larger Pacific cultural context. The titles of the individual pieces, John Pule's writings, are about the personal. The titles in

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251 Image;www.martinbrownefineart.com;media.apn.co.nz/webcontent/image/jpg/24sofia.JPGwww.nzherald.co.nz 22 Dec 2005.

252 www.martinbrownefineart.com 22 Dec 2005. This pose is derived from the position of the model when she was playing with the flower while looking in the mirror. It is not related to the hand movements of Polynesian dance.

253 Mulford, T., *Interview with Sofia Tekela-Smith, Artist* Greyland, Auckland, 2005.

association with the images reflect the artist's intention and must be taken into consideration to decode meaning. She says:

> The poetry is written by John and why I used these particular words is the way that he writes about the Pacific and the imagery that he uses, that's how I feel about where I come from. I like the idea of wearing his poetry. Like not only just reading it in your head, but actually it being part of you, short of being tattooed on your body you could wear it.[254]

The models in the photographs are women she knows and admires; all but one have Island heritage. They wear mother of pearl body adornments, their hands dipped in red almost to their elbows. The hand gestures of the first three emulate Polynesian island dance movements. The fourth, the only one not looking directly at the viewer, is derived from the manner in which the model was looking in the mirror to adjust the flower behind the ear. Three return the viewer's gaze; the fourth acts as a mirror reflection. All invite the viewer to question their exotic/erotic notion of female Pacific identity; yet at the same time the lusciousness of the images acts as a reinforcement of that notion.

Each of the women are doing a different movement and telling a different story. The jewellery is in the form of the South Pacific lei, symbolising respect and welcome and honour. The women are bare-breasted, but the jewellery is large enough so that their breasts are not exposed. Tekela-Smith did not want to repeat the exotic way Polynesian woman have been displayed since first contact. They are however very seductive and sensuous, despite her intention to be otherwise. She says:

> ...where it's 'Come to the islands. There's these women with their breasts bare and they're just running round in grass skirts and so on'. I was aware of that -- of that image -- free sex, free love in the Pacific you know -- and I was aware that that's been done before and I could reference it in my work, but I didn't want my work to be about that. I wanted it to be about these women, about what they do here and now. They were my muse. I'm not my muse and I couldn't put myself in it.[255]

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254 Ibid.
255 Ibid.

The red hands are the result of a dream: "And in the dream, these two women came up to me and I always think that this was my grandmother who brought me up and... one woman said to me 'Their hands must be red' ". Red is a very significant Polynesian colour; the red feather is very important in ceremonial rituals and traditions. The red colour also has personal meaning to Tekela-Smith. It reminds her of her grandmother who was a massage healer. The massage ritual required that the person being healed be forbidden anything with the colour red for five days.

Once again, the work forms a triple work of art: the body adornment, Pule's writing in the titles, and the contextual photograph. The glamorous models, the seductive gestures, the precious jewellery are in contrast to the red hands and the direct gaze. The women emerging from the darkness are like visions, suggestive of the dream which spurred the use of the red hands. The red hands and forearms are challenging, suggesting not only the meanings with which Tekela-Smith imbues them, but others. Unintentionally, it connotes crime and guilt, 'hands dipped in blood', perhaps an indication of the destructive colonial past in relation to the Pacific. The seductive gestures are negated by the red hands; the red hands are forbidding, echoing the restrictions of healing massage process. The over-life size scale envelops the viewer. Those gazing directly at the viewer have a stronger presence. Once again, the images both challenge and reinforce stereotyped notions of Pacific identity in relation to colonial exoticism/eroticism.

Sofia's body adornments are strongly steeped in the tradition and are worn on the body. The gallery context, particularly for the photographs, accentuates their power. The photographs keep body and object in relationship one to the other, mediating the viewer's response. They illustrate M. Kirby's[256] view that objects displayed on a person retain signification and ritual in a more cross-cultural way. The initial seductiveness of the works means that some time is necessary to get beyond the first impression in order to decode other meanings.

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256 Kirby, M., "1 Noble Savage 2 Dusky Maidens," *Object* 3, 2000.

The photographic male and female images are 'autoethnographic'. Autoethnography is a term Mary Louise Pratt[257] uses to refer to instances in which colonised subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways which engage the coloniser's own terms. It is a way in which 'others' construct texts in response to or in dialogue with metropolitan representations. Autoethnography enables the viewer to regard former narratives from different perspectives; it is a technique also used by Michael and Anna Mel to engage with the audience (Page 57).

Tekela-Smith states that her body adornments are her art, that she is not a photographic artist. She is successful in her intention, which is that: "... the aesthetics of self-ornamentation and the idea that jewellery form[s] a complex of signs and symbols that amount to a visual-language feast".[258] However, the photographic collaboration has created new dialogues. She shifts material culture into visual culture, bundling concepts together to force discussion, question perceptions, and challenge frames of reference.

The structure of the work previously discussed emphasises the wearable aspect despite the gallery context. In contrast, most of the work of Julie Gough and Niki Hastings-McFall is no longer meant to worn. Titles, materials and metaphorical associations are highly considered. Their work emphasizes discourse rather than narrative. The discourses vary; some are challenging and accusatory; others are celebratory and ecstatic about the possibilities of the new and the hybrid.

Tasmanian Aboriginal artist, Julie Gough (b. 1965, Aboriginal/European heritage), investigates and extends the shell necklace tradition. The manner in which she accesses it makes the viewer conscious of the influence of history and colonisation on Aboriginal tradition and culture. She stands both within and outside the tradition creating different narratives; she encourages dialogues

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257 Hooper-Greenhill, E., *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* Routledge,,London and New York, 2000, p. 86.

258 Tekela-Smith as cited http://images.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=http://www.johnleechgallery.co.nz/galleries/tekelasmith/womansun2004.jpg&imgrefurl 21 Dec 2004.

within and between cultures. The titles of the works, the material used, the scale and the gallery context greatly influence the viewer's response. Gough addresses issues of changing Aboriginal identity and entangled histories.

Gough's work is mournful and celebratory, challenging and sinister, humorous and deadly serious at one and the same time. It struggles to define identity, past and present. A sense of loss resonates from the work, reflecting her attitude to her cultural background. There is also joy in being able to acknowledge her Aboriginal culture in a contemporary and metaphorical way. Marita Bullock[259] considers that Gough harnesses melancholy and humour as a tactic for survival. The challenging character of the work questions the history of the dominant authority and looks to silences in relation to Tasmanian historical perspectives. The work involved in the making process and her choice of materials are important. Unlike Greeno's work, Gough's work has an edge to it. Traditional meanings continue to be referenced but new meanings are encoded. Gough says:

> I particularly enjoy responding to and reconfiguring natural materials into narratives relating their original environment and my own and my ancestors' encounters, actions and traces in these places with these same types of materials. This is an anxious position where many of the materials inviting curiosity, and initially implying the humorous, accrue a sinister edge as the viewer reaches a point of understanding his/her caged predicament within the work.[260]

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259 Bullock, M., "Melancholy Debris: Black Humour and Colonial Memory in Grids," *Now Writing Southerly* 65, 1, 2005.

260 Gough, J., *"Webbio,"* Feb 2005.

Figure 43: Julie Gough (From left to right) *Drift, Lifebearer, Seam,* 2005[261]
Driftwood, pumice, coal, nylon wire; variable dimensions

The scale of Gough's recent 'bigger-than-me' necklaces *Drift, Lifebearer* and *Seam* makes them emblematic, accentuating their narrative and their meaning within and outside her Aboriginal culture (Figure 43). She says that by making these necklaces, she is asking herself "Is the traditional shell necklace today a carefully maintained sign of cultural continuity, connectivity, authenticity and authority and so very different to what it was 200 years + ago? (I don't know what it once was)."[262] The necklaces are touchstones for her Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage, while at the same time, they have become tools for navigating and negotiating her position between cultural expectations, her heritage and the larger Australian community. Now based in Queensland, Gough expresses through her necklaces a longing for her island home and a need to return and reconnect to her culture. Together these three necklaces allude to the push-pull of sea to land, to the manner in which one must navigate and negotiate one's way. *Drift,* constructed of collected driftwood, metaphorically becomes her 'magical necklace' that might enable her to drift back to Tasmania. The pumice material used in *Lifebearer*, floats of its own accord and metaphorically could be the life preserver to take her home. *Seam,*

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261 Julie Gough's Website http://homes.jcu.edu.au/~jc156215/lifebaereSeamDrift.htm Accessed 13 March 2006.

262 Ibid.

constructed of coal, is symbolic of home, hearth, firesticks and land. For Gough, *Seam* is the most anxiety ridden of the three necklaces. It represents the weight of ancestry and her 'tightrope' negotiation between two worlds. She says: "I feel afraid to light my coal necklace at this point in my life..."[263] This negotiation makes her worry that the popularising of traditional forms may water down cultural meaning. The enlarged scale is an effort to counter blurred meaning. It also changes the nature of the object, away from material culture into art culture. The decoding of their meaning requires a gallery setting.

Her most recent 2006 necklace, *Return*, is an installation at Friendly Beaches, Tasmania (Figure 44). The work, constructed of abalone shells, is ephemeral; its existence continues in photographic form only. The scale is even larger than the 'bigger-than-me' necklaces *Drift, Lifebearer* and *Seam.* This work not only metaphorically references her need to return to Tasmania but larger object and land repatriation issues. No string connects any one shell to any other, apart from the resistance of the grains of sand which temporarily enables them to be positioned. *Return* is subject to the push pull of the tides which will eventually return the abalone shells to the sea from which they were collected. The traditional necklace has been completely deconstructed.

263 Ibid.

Figure 44: Julie Gough *Return* 2006[264]
Installation, Reycinet Peninsula, Ephemeral Art at Friendly Lodge

Two earlier works related to traditional necklaces are *Now and then* and *Cowrie, pippie, crow, cowrie, pippie, crow* (Figures 45 & 46). *Now and then* is a rhythmically sequenced necklace, made of cowrie shells twined with lomandra. Once again, title, material and metaphor are highly considered. The use of shell and plant fibre is culturally significant. The shells, which progress from white to brown, refer to the changing external appearance of Aboriginal people. Gough says it: "refers to us Tasmanian Aboriginal people, now and then, today and two hundred years ago, now white on the outside, then we were a dark brown, so the work is a kind of literal translation to suggest that we are the same (cowries) on the inside and have only changed on the outside."[265]

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264 *Return* is an installation at Friendly Beaches, Freycinet Peninsula, *Ephemeral Art at the Friendly Lodge* exhibition, February 2006. The image from Julie Gough's Powerpoint Presentation was given to the author, April 2006.

265 Gough, J., *Julie Gough Select Artworks 1994-2004*, JulieGougharttext.ppt, 2005.

Figure 45 (left): Julie Gough *Now and then* 2001[266]
Shells and lomandra twine; dimensions are about necklace size
Figure 46 (right): Julie Gough *Cowrie, pippie, crow, cowrie, pippie, crow* 2001[267]
Tea-tree wood, bull kelp, lomandra; dimensions unknown

Cowrie, pippie, crow, cowrie, pippie, crow (Figure 46) is constructed of different shells that hang from a horizontal wooden twig. Unlike *Now and Then,* the necklace structure is no longer evident, but the materials and their arrangement are significant. The sound of the title, like the structure of the work, suggests movement, sound, and mantra associated with cultural rituals. The rhythm and repetition of the words reflect the spacing of shells. The shells act as touchstones for cultural remembrance and connection. The structure of this piece is not tightly enclosed. The loose fibres on the ends of the shells extend into the space in all directions, suggestive of the manner in which sound, rhythm and movement continue through space.

Figure 47: Julie Gough *Climbing Country* 2000
Lomandra ropes, ~3 m. in length

266 Ibid.
267 Ibid.

In Gough's work, *Climbing Country*, a series of three twelve foot[268] lomandra ropes are suspended downwards with the ends sitting on the floor of the gallery (Figure 47). There are a series of knots at even intervals in each of the ropes. The knots function as indicators of larger meaning and echo symbols in Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish belief systems, where numbers of strings, knots and/or bindings have multiple levels of meaning, the understanding of which is dependent on a person's level of religious practice and position in the community. They act as reminders of teachings, moral codes and obligations. Gough says that the knots form rhythms to create cues to remember something forgotten. Of this work, Gough says: "these three ropes tell my wish to move beyond what is the physical realm to move out of the gallery, or other exhibiting space, and upwards and outwards to a greater understanding of my country, people, practices, culture from where I come."[269]

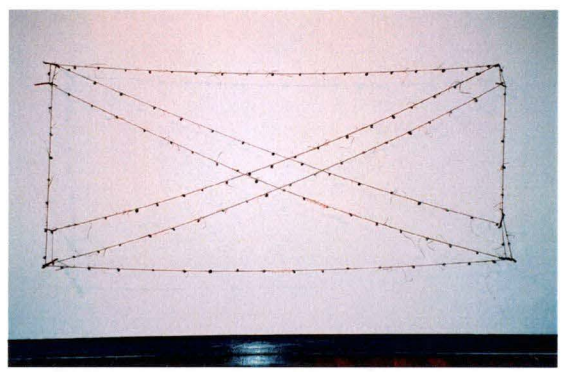

Figure 48: Julie Gough *Stronghold (Cat's cradle)* 2003[270]
Twined lomandra, blackcrow shells, feathers;variable dimensions ~ 1 x 2 m

Gough references cat's cradles and their metaphorical connection to the transmission of culture in her work, *Stronghold (Cat's cradle)* (Figure 48). The work consists of small black shells on lomandra twine in a shape suggestive of a cat's cradle or string game. The materials are culturally and historically significant. For Gough, the small black shells (*nerita atramentosa*) are also called 'Black crows'. She explains that crows were: "the names given to Aboriginal people by some early white settlers, in particular when referring in

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268 The imperial measurements were provided by the artist. Metrically, the ropes would be in excess of three metres.

269 Gough, J., *Julie Gough Select Artworks 1994-2004*, JulieGougharttext.ppt, 2005.

270 Ibid.

code to how many they had shot in a day, how many 'crows' were disposed of". Gough sees it not only as a cat's cradle but also as a flag and a gate. Its scale makes it also read as the union cross in the British flag thereby referencing the colonised and the coloniser at one and the same time. The gate refers to the link or gateway contemporary urban Aboriginals must open to access their cultural connections. She says:

> In making this work I strongly wished to express that even whilst living a modern and mobile existence one carries the meanings, the communicative aspects of culture regardless of location or luggage.... The shells spaced along the length of the endless twine are a reminder also of my Tasmanian culture and attachment, in particular, to the coast of that island.[271]

One of Gough's works references indigenous culture and Western culture to illustrate how cultural meanings can be blurred through the popularising traditional objects. Shell necklaces are one part of the work.

Figure 49: Julie Gough *Magnum as Cook in the Time/Space continuum* (detail) 1997[272]
Installation with painted triptych, shell necklaces, floral dresses

The work, *Operation aloha! Magnum as Cook* (Figure 49) is composite and complex in structure and meaning. It confronts dominant cultures, travellers and explorers who misunderstood and continue to misunderstand the customs and culture of 'other' people. It is part of a larger installation which questions

271 Ibid.
272 Ibid.

historical accounts and often racist colonialist beliefs and activities. *Operation aloha! Magnum as Cook* consists of a range of found and made objects. It includes a triptych of a painting of Magnum[273] flanked by two paintings that 'copy' the scenic surrounds of the 'original' magnum image, which in turn are framed by floral dresses. Approximately 70 tourist market shell necklaces, suspended below the triptych like a skirt, hang away from the wall and cast shadows. In the middle paintings a shark from the movie "Jaws" rises to devour Magnum and in the right painting, Pacific Islanders paddle out to greet Magnum. The composite images and materials critique colonisation (Cook in particular), tourism (shell necklaces, floral dresses), and popular dominant culture (Magnum, Jaws). The shell necklaces may once have had important cultural meaning but that meaning has been trivialised by tourism. Gough considers that their original meanings are devalued when the person to whom the necklaces were originally 'gifted' dispose of them. The original special relationship of gift to giver is not cherished, it is has become a commodity, a market transaction.[274]

Whereas Mabia, Greeno, Gough, and Tekela-Smith reference 'stringed things' from within their culture, Niki Hastings-McFall (b. 1959, Samoan Father and English mother) refers to objects from several cultures, sometimes combining them, to comment on entangled histories in general and hers in particular. Hastings-McFall's concerns about cultural misunderstanding and loss lead her to search for ways to negotiate hybrid identity in order to reconcile the past and look to the future.

In the works *Nuclear Rosary series* 1999, *Breast plate Series* 1999, *The Coming of Light: Malie, Malie, Malie* 2000, and *Fl/oral Series* 2002, she hybridises objects from the colonised and the coloniser cultures and demands a rethinking of history and art history from her Samoan culture's perspective so that she can navigate her present situation. Hastings-McFall intertwines Christian symbols, such as rosaries and crosses, with Pacific items of adornment, such as leis and feathers, in such a way that the conceptual

273 Magnum is a Hawaiian-based Detective from the 1980s TV series.
274 Email between Therese Mulford and Julie Gough, 13 March 2006.

framework of the original objects is changed. Original encoded meanings are heightened because of the oppositional placement.[275]

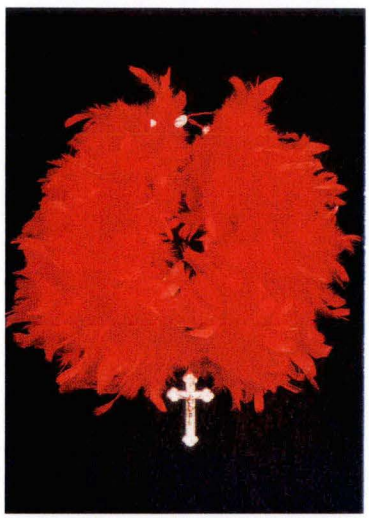

Figure 50: Niki Hastings-McFall *Red Feather Ula* 1997[276]
Dyed red feathers, shell, braided tapestry silk, purchased crucifix,
fake mother of pearl and basemetal; dimensions unknown

Her work is challenging and provocative. For instance, in the work, *Red Feather Ula*[277], a purchased crucifix is combined with red feathers (Figure 50). Red feathers were considered sacred with high spiritual status in pre-colonial Pacific Island Societies.[278] Many artefacts and rituals were lost as a result of missionisation in the colonial period. This piece, as do other pieces, questions the sanctity of a church that annihilates a culture in order to impose its social and moral values.

The rosary, *Nuclear Rosary, White Sunday*, is constructed of white luminous plastic flowers, separated with spacers of smaller beads made from her grandmother's Christian rosary (Figure 51). The large plastic flowers reference the lei, which in Polynesian culture symbolise welcome and honour. The structure resembles a Christian rosary. Like Gough's bigger-than-me

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275 Cochrane, S., 2001,op cit, pp. 119-223.

276 Postcard for *Past Pacific* jewellery exhibition, Fingers Gallery, Auckland 1997.

277 Definition of ula: The 'Ula Fala is part of the complete costume of the Samoan culture especially important for the Matai (family chief) signifying honour and respect and is worn during special occasions. They are made from the fruit pod of the Pandanus tree, dried and painted red. They are also made of bone and other materials. http://cgi.ebay.com/SAMOAN-Traditional-ULA-FALA-Necklace-Red-SAMOA-Dance_W0QQitemZ7748802995QQcategoryZ13765QQcmdZViewItem

278 Postcard for *Past Pacific* jewellery exhibition, Fingers Gallery, Auckland 1997.

necklaces, the large size of the work makes it unwearable; it reads more like sculpture. Hastings-McFall comments on how the work has taken on added meaning.

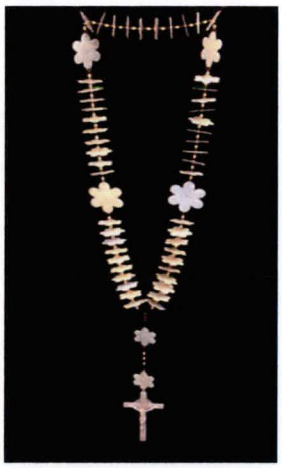

Figure 51: Niki Hastings-McFall *The Coming of the Light II, White Sunday* 1999
Nuclear Rosary Series; Glow in the dark flowers, luminous crucifix,
Nan's old rosary beads; Hanging length 100 cm

She says:

> At that stage I was really just looking at the construction and the similarity of the lei to the rosary. Not in terms of function, but just in terms of its form. But looking back you can say, "Well the function of the lei is to honour" and that's what you're doing when you're praying to your God, isn't it? The rosary series was in relation to my research about the effect of Christianity on the Pacific and the arrival of the missionaries. These luminous, glow-in-the-dark, plastic flowers were a metaphor for the nuclear issues which have plagued the Pacific for quite some time. I was equating the arrival of Christianity and the Western society or civilisation with a more recent, but just as devastating in some ways, use of the Pacific by various super powers to set off their nuclear bombs and use the Pacific as a dumping ground basically. I settled on the rosary form partly because it resembled the lei which I'd been working with for quite some time, but also because my father's family are all Catholic and that stretches right back to the first European to enter our family.[279]

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279 Mulford, T., *Interview with Niki Hastings-Mcfall, Artist* Te Atatu South, 2005.

In Hastings-McFall's work, the rosary is no longer a symbol of shared belief, no longer a respected object but the symbol of values and codes inflicted on one culture by another. The structure as a rosary remains identifiable but it is encoded with new meanings through the title. The combination of the word 'nuclear' with 'rosary' demands that the viewer examine issues raised by that choice of words. 'White Sunday' is linked to worship and prayer and back to the rosary. For Hastings-McFall, the colour white carries the meanings from both cultures; it is the colour people wear to church and is the symbol of purity, spirituality and death.

Although the work is too big to wear, the body is referenced by the manner in which it is hung on the gallery wall. The works are meant to be hung at a level where the majority of viewers feel as if they are wearing them as they look at them. Scale not only overwhelms the body physically but suggests the power and influence of Christianity and the nuclear testing on the Pacific.

Hastings-McFall reverses the West's process of sourcing imagery, content and meaning from the 'primitive'. She deconstructs a Western object and fuses and amalgamates it with a Pacific one. The once separate narratives are reconstructed into a distinctively new narrative. The process of deconstruction and reconstruction is closely aligned to personal experience and relationships. The smaller spacers between the large fluorescent plastic flowers were once a rosary used by her grandmother, her 'nana'. The reconstruction of her grandmother's rosary into a new rosary reflects the re-examination and reconstruction of her history and identity.

When questioned whether anyone had taken offence to her rosary reconstructions, Hastings-McFall said she did not know of any. Although this work came from the tradition of body adornment, she thought that it was likely regarded as jewellery, despite it being unwearable. She says: "Jewellery really isn't very important in the art world". As far as she knew, the clients who purchased the work were mainly Roman Catholic. "On the one hand, I think there's that Catholic guilt thing; they may know what I intended it to mean in

the first place but otherwise, they may just like them as a form -- as a rosary and they just hang them on their wall over their bed at night."[280] This raises questions as to whether public response would have been different if the rosary in question were a prayer strand from a different religion such as Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam.

Hastings-McFall says that her response to the influence of Christianity in the Pacific has changed somewhat since she started making the *Nuclear Rosary Series*, partly as a result of her research. Her later work critiques the past less and explores future possibilities more. She says:

> I've got a bit more of a benign take on it now. There isn't any getting away from the fact that Christianity and nuclear testing have done a lot of damage to the Pacific, but unlike nuclear testing I think Christianity has also had its place and it's become so much part of Samoa that you'd be pretty naïve to keep pushing that barrow. You've got good intentions and bad results sometimes and it's just one of those things. In my research, I read that when the Christians arrived, there had just been a bloody massacre because the Chief wanted to control the whole of Samoa and he was massacring and pillaging and looting and burning and when the Christians arrived they could see the smoke from the burning of all the bodies that he'd killed. So people were kind of pleased to stick to a more user-friendly way of living. They were happy to get the message of peace and love and good will to all men and that sort of thing. You know they were more than ready for it and plus the fact that it had been anticipated and predicted [by War Goddess Nafanua].[281]

Other leis *Lei for George Westbrook* and *Shadow Catcher dark necklace lei* refer to other historical views and attitudes towards Christianity and colonisation (Figures 52 & 53). Christian and Pacific forms are amalgamated in the *Lei for George Westbrook* (Figure 52). The lei is constructed from the pages of a hymn book folded into flower shapes separated by Pacific island

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280 Ibid.
281 Ibid.

seeds and strung on nylon fishing line. Elements of both cultures are referenced in the hymn book and seeds. The fishing line is a practical stringing solution but it relates to the fact the island people are also sea-faring people.

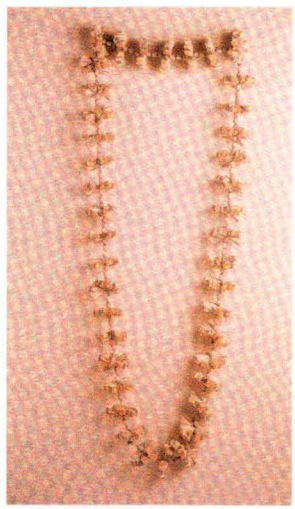

Figure 52: Niki Hastings-McFall *Lei for George Westbrook* 1997[282]
Hymn book, Pacific Island seeds, nylon fishing line; Total length 160 cm

In order to understand her personal history, Hastings-McFall researched western literary and photographic sources referring to early European contact in the Pacific. She found that George Westbrook was one of the few Europeans who wrote about the breakdown in Polynesian customs and codes of existence and who questioned the benefits of missionisation and European influence. Hastings-McFall's original idea had been to cut up bible pages but there was something too 'disrespectful' in that process so that she discarded the idea. "I was going to make it out of a bible, but I couldn't bring myself to cut up a bible, so I went out and cut up a hymn book instead." Her change of intention illustrates her understanding of the power of symbols and the seriousness involved in their desecration, something that could be considered sacrilege. She treads that fine line between critique and sacrilege in order to reveal new insights.

282 Past Pacific Jewellery by Niki Hastings-McFall 1997.

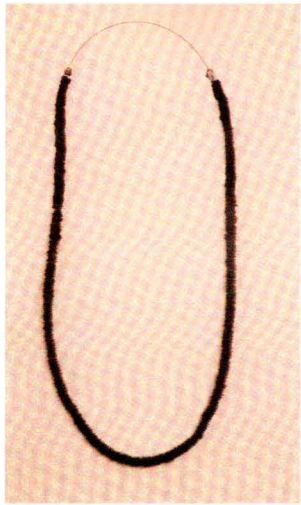

Figure 53: Niki Hastings-McFall *Shadow Catcher dark necklace lei* 1997[283]
Film stock, plastic encased copper fishing wire; length 100 cm

Another work, *Shadow Catcher dark necklace lei,* is constructed of cut photographic film stock in the form of flower shapes. The work illustrates the irony that the evidence of her history can now only be accessed through the diaries, journals and photographic records of the very race of people responsible for its decline. The title *Shadow Catcher* refers to the name island people gave to the photographer, Donald Sloan. His book *Polynesian Paradise* documented a civilisation he referred to as living a hundred years 'behind the calendar'. The images on the cut up film flower shapes can no longer be viewed because they have been cut up and folded. This is a metaphor illustrating the loss of the rich oral Pacific island history. Hastings-McFall develops and presents the viewer with a different concept of Pacific paradise through the reconstruction of the lei. The replacement of original culturally significant materials (flowers) with other significant materials such as hymn pages, or with culturally neutral or alien material, such as plastic, film stock, hymn pages, makes the viewer more aware of their preconceptions. A different image of Pacific paradise emerges, one that is fragmented, contradictory and hybrid.

283 Past Pacific Jewellery by Niki Hastings-McFall 1997.

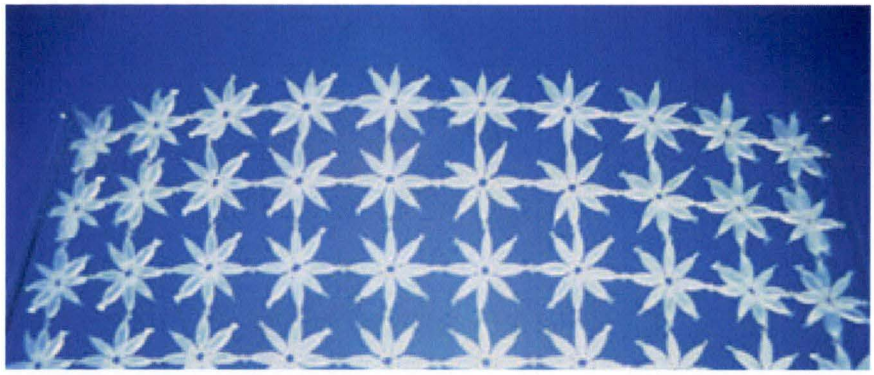

Figure 54: Niki Hastings-McFall *Soulcatcher* The Coming of the Light Series (Detail,) 2001
Plastic soy bottles, sterling silver, acrylic rod; 64 x 100 cm

Notions of Pacific paradise and gardens of Eden are placed side by side in the work *Soulcatcher* The Coming of the Light Series (Figure 544). It is constructed from discarded materials, plastic fish-shaped soy containers, which are joined to form a flowered net. The negative spaces between the flowers form crosses. The cross or crucifix is used by Hastings-McFall to illustrate the unifying and destructive power of institutionalised faith. The negative spaces can be seen as star patterns, alluding to Pacific navigation. The fish/flower/crucifix/star net has multiple references, from suburban net curtains, to fishing nets, to missionaries fishing for souls, and to the fishing/navigating skill of oceanic Pacific cultures. The past and present are intertwined. The entangled Pacific and European histories are referenced by objects of both cultures, the lei and the contemporary urban throw-away. The necklace/rosary form has been further deconstructed to make a grid, with the serial repetition of the elements. Hastings-McFall's forms are moving away from jewellery/body adornment into object-based expression.

The title of the work is a reminder of the Cook Island work, *Soulcatcher,* the work illustrated next to Hesse's work in the *Primitivism in 20th -Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* exhibition. Although this is intriguing, it was done unknowingly by Hastings-McFall. For her, the title is significant for other reasons. It has to do with the Christians catching the souls of the Islanders through religious conversion. About the naming of the series 'The Coming of the Light', she says:

> 'The coming of the light' was a phrase commonly used by colonist missionaries in the 19th century when they were evangelising in the

South Seas. It is a condescending and somewhat negative reference to the time of 'darkness', before enlightenment was brought to the heathen natives. For better or worse the introduction of Christianity has had a profound impact on Pacific culture. I perceive Christianity as an interface between the Western and Pacific cultures and an area of both unification and division; a microcosmic representation of the tensions resultant from interaction between the two cultures which largely constitute my heredity. As a product of several cultures I find it intriguing to juxtapose the various different cultural readings of similar symbols and create a work which can have several ambivalent interpretations which are dependent upon the viewer.[284]

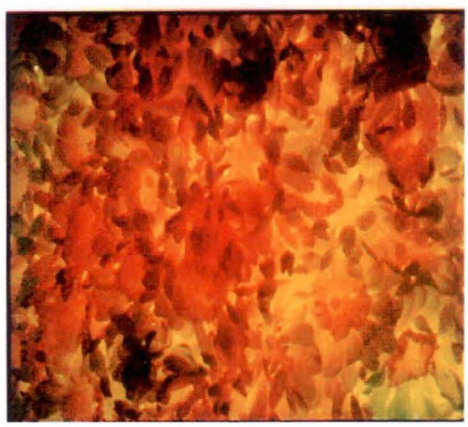

Figure 55: Niki Hastings-McFall*Yellow light* (detail) 2003[285]
Fl/Oral Histories: Lei Light Series; plastic leis, light box

She explores light and leis further. *The Fl/Oral Histories: Lei Light Series* continue metaphors about Pacific Paradise and the Garden of Eden (Figure 55). This series is made from the flowers of unravelled $2 tourist leis, which have been restitched and placed into grid formation onto a backlit light box. The flower references Polynesia, the Garden of Eden, spiritual flowering, and love. The $2 leis also refer to historical tourist attitudes to the Pacific. Formerly, Christian missionaries wanted to conquer the savage island soul; today, the tourist covets the savage exotic body.

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284 Hastings-McFall, N., *The Coming of the Light; Malie!Malie!Malie!*, Auckland, 1999.

285 Stevenson, K., *Niki Hastings-McFall Navigating the Light* Bartley-Nees Gallery, Wellington, 2002.

Leis are used in times of celebration and joy as well as times of sadness and loss, in funeral and death rites. The placement of the flowers on light boxes forms a cross alluding to the crucifixion and redemption. The rich colour from the transmitted light brings to mind stained glass windows and Christianity. The deconstruction of the lei, pulling it apart and restitching it, was a time-consuming process which Hastings-McFall found "almost a form of meditation itself". She hopes that viewers might have a similar meditative response to the work. The process of deconstructing the lei reflects the underlying concept of the work where former ideas are deconstructed to reconstruct new meanings.

The play on words in the series title 'Fl/Oral Histories: Lei Light Series' is highly considered. The leis, originally used to celebrate ideas of giving, beauty, worship, colour and healing, have been deconstructed to reference Hastings-McFall's two histories, that of the coming of Christianity to Samoa in the 1830's and her personal family history. Hastings-McFall's family history cannot be traced to pre-European Christian times. It can only be traced for six generations to the marriage of the daughter of paramount chief, Tua'ilemafua Avaloa, to a French missionary, Joseph Godinet. The arrival of Christianity erased all oral history prior to its arrival. The floral history works are mournful, lamenting historical and cultural loss, and celebratory and joyful, reflecting the use of flowers in Polynesia to adorn the home, vehicles, clothing, furnishings and photos of loved ones.[286]

Hastings-McFall's choice of colour is deliberate. Red white and blue together are the colours of colonisation (British and New Zealand flags). Blue is the colour of the virgin and of sadness; white, the colour of going to church on Sunday; red, the sacred colour of Polynesia.

Her work is a constant discourse of opposites: the decorative with the spiritually contemplative, light with dark, positive with negative spaces, sensuousness of the flowers with loss of history, rowdiness and earthly pleasures with quiet meditative and contemplative states. The cross symbolises

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286 Hastings-McFall, N., *Rise up Singing Fl/Oral Histories*, Auckland 2003.

Christ, but Hastings-McFall questions the existence of God or a greater spiritual being, saying that we have the ability to understand two kinds of truth, one based on facts, the other based on trust and faith. She says that with light, there is a shadow of doubt too.[287]

Hastings- McFall uses materials from the urban environment such as reflective roadside vinyl, artificial leis, and plastic sushi fish, rather than plant material from the natural environment originally used for the making of leis. The discardable by-products of urban life are turned into culturally loaded objects. Many of her works reference light or its reflection symbolically. Fluorescent reflective roadside plastic and the kind of light produced from that material is associated with enlightenment and its doubtful benefit, and to reference dualities such as white vs dark, good vs evil, day vs night, and Christian whiteness vs savage darkness. The manner in which the works are lit, or conversely unlit, is vital for optimum viewing of the objects but also to create an ambience conducive to the multiple meanings of the work.

The juxtaposition of various symbols recognises addresses and critiques historical and contemporary issues such as difference, ideology, power and cliché. As a consequence, there are various cultural readings of similar icons and symbols. Identity is explored through history, genealogy, stories, and memory. She challenges Western contemporary clichés of Polynesian dusky maiden and noble savage identity.

Artist, Jonathan Jones (b. 1978, Aboriginal), is attracted to the confident engagement by Pacific artists who negotiate vivaciously with their post-colonial and diasporic histories.[288] Like Hastings-McFall, Jones uses the meaning and articulation of light to look at issues of identity. Unlike Hastings-McFall where light is associated with the force of Christianity over indigenous peoples, Jones uses light as a metaphor for the transmission of knowledge and purpose from one generation to another. As an artist from the Australian

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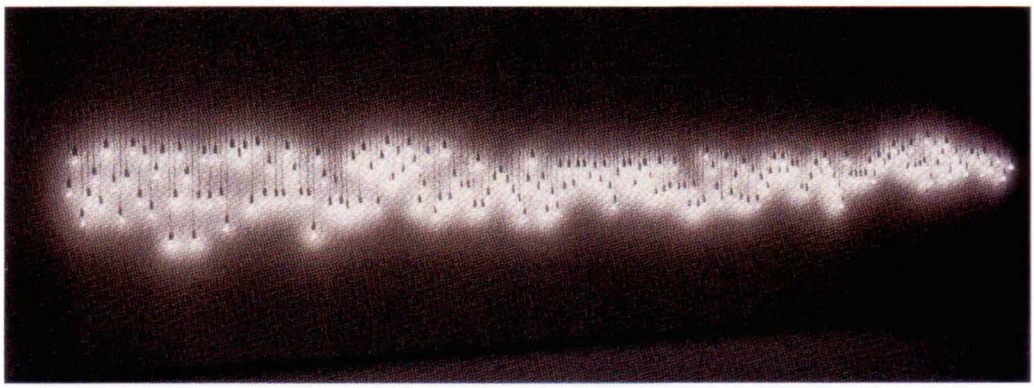
287 Gardiner, S., "The Sanctuary and the Garden," *Australian Art Review*, 3, 2004.

288 Stephens, J. 'Profile: Jonathan Jones' www.experimenta.org/mesh17/jones.htm, accessed 26 June 2006.

Aboriginal Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri Nations[289], he uses culturally neutral material to celebrate the diversity of Aboriginality and explore Aboriginal urban identity in the context of community.[290, 291]



Jonathan Jones, 68 Fletcher, Bondi, 20:20, 8.6.03, *2003, electrical cable, light fittings and bulbs and movement sensors. In* Primavera 2003, *at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Courtesy of the artist and Barry Keldoulis Gallery, Sydney, and the MCA. Photo Greg Weight.*

Figure 56: Jonathan Jones *68 Fletcher, Bondi, 20:20, 8.6.03* 2003
Installation, electrical cable, light fittings, bulbs, movement sensors

His light map work, *68 Fletcher, Bondi, 20:20, 8.6.03*, explores the importance of identity within a community and the positive outcome of developing urban relationships outside traditional land boundaries (Figure 56). The lights trace the Bondi night skyline from the sea. A series of light bulbs are hung at different lengths from the ceiling of a darkened room. The movement of the viewer in the room installation triggers the light bulbs to turn on and off, changing the pattern and lighting sequences. The patterns explore the symbiotic relationship between the gallery viewer and the work. This, in turn, reflects the importance of symbiotic relationships in the community and how interaction is culturally affirming. The use of light has connotations of insight, the capacity to see.

Jones associates the contemporary electric light bulb with urbanisation. The lights also allude to historical accounts of the Cadigal people night fishing with the use of fires. The fires, lit on a mud base within their canoes, looked like the reflection of a star constellation on the water. The individual lights, together,

289 Recently he has had to defend himself against suggestions that he has appropriated an Aboriginal identity. www.abc.net.au/message/radio/awaye/stories/s1650846.htm, 2 June 2006.

290 www.synapse.net.au/srtist/detail.php?ID=23, accessed 26 June 2006.

291 Smith, R., "Jonathan Jones," *Art Monthly Australia* 168, April, 2004, p. 40.

form a larger interlocking source of illumination.[292] The different light sequences/patterns and the varied lengths of the light globes have echoes in the encoded meanings of traditional Aboriginal armbands, where the length of string and the position of feather attachments on the armbands are strong signifiers for those within the community (Figure 57) .

Figure 57: Australian Aboriginal armband; Boys' initiation ceremony at Ngangalala[293]

Jones uses contemporary everyday materials to highlight the importance of connectedness in urban life. Schwarz says that 'Jonathan Jones's lines of light signify not the linearity of Western historicism but illuminate spaces of exchange, symbiosis and optimism."[294] He emphasises the importance of negotiating and maintaining identity through relationships and interaction.

Like Jones, Maureen Lander[295] (b. 1942, Pakeha and Maori descent) is also concerned with connections and exchanges between the past and the future. Also, like Jones, she is positive about possibilities of new understandings. She is an artist of European and Maori descent, who explores the space where different cultures and ideas meet. She is motivated to extend her parameters of knowledge and to regain her Maori heritage. Her work is constructed in string, using traditional materials such as flax (harakeke), sedge (pingao) and

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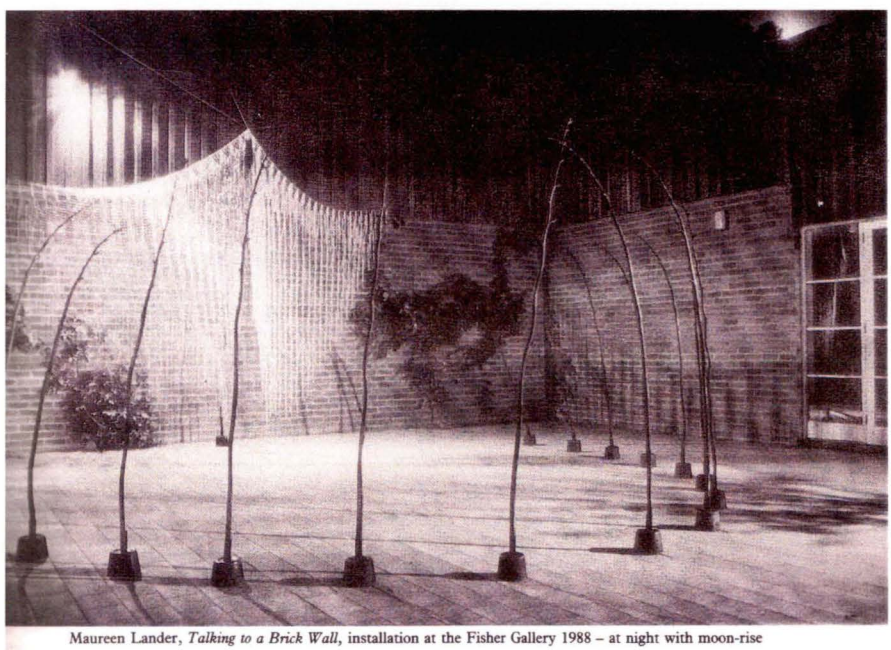
292 www.artaustralia.com/emergingartist_jonathanjones.asp, accessed 26 June 2006.
293 Rudder, J. et al, 1996, op cit, p. 182.
294 www.artaustralia.com/emergingartist_jonathanjones.asp, accessed 26 June 2006.
295 From this point on, Lander refers to Maureen and not Michael.

lacebark, and contemporary materials such as lace, nylon line, fluorescent string, electric speakers, and computers.

Lander's work *Talking to a Brick Wall* hopes for the possibility of discourse and interchange, despite different frames of reference (Figure 58). The work consists of large quills of flax and nylon netting, one supporting the other to create a central space. Priscilla Pitts[296] says Lander weaves elements of indigenous and colonising cultures together without denying or detracting from either. The flax quills represent Maori culture; the plastic netting represents Western culture. She creates a space where the two cultures might reconcile. Its simplicity of structure camouflages its complexity of meaning.



Maureen Lander, *Talking to a Brick Wall*, installation at the Fisher Gallery 1988 – at night with moon-rise

Figure 58: Maureen Lander *Talking to a Brick Wall*1988[297]
Installation at Fisher Gallery; flax quills and nylon netting; dimensions unknown

Lander's work is best experienced rather than viewed by reproduction. As she says: "I think my messages are quiet messages. If an installation is working well it will be like looking at the sea or watching a fire burn."[298] She often references art historical sources. For instance, Rene Magritte's title 'This is not

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296 Pitts, P., "Exhibitions - Maureen Lander 'Talking to a Brick Wall'," *Art New Zealand*, Spring, 1988.

297 Ibid.

298 Brown, A., "Fleeting Visions, Evocative Artworks Not Built to Last," *Hawke's Bay Today* 8 September 1999.

a pipe' becomes 'This is not a kete[299]'. She encourages debate about language, believing that the meaning of certain words is not translatable into another language and that words do not describe the essence of things. These conflicts are not regarded as problematic but are seen as a point of departure where new insights and articulations can be obtained.

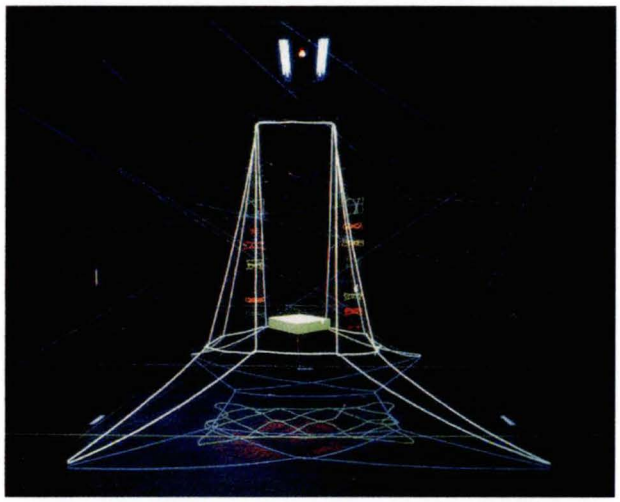

Figure 59: Maureen Lander *String Games* 1998[300]
Fluorescent strings; dimensions unknown

The *String Games* installation has historical references to James McDonald's 1919-1921 black and white photographs of Maori performing cat's cradles or string games (mahi whai) (Figure 59). It also draws on Marcel Duchamp's works, *Boite en Valise*, a portable box museum holding replicas of his work, and *Sixteen Miles of String* (Figure 60). Many of Maureen Lander's concerns in art making are similar to the issues raised by Duchamp's Sixteen *Miles of String*. *Sheldon* Nodelman[301] comments that Duchamp's installations were, for the most part, poorly documented and insufficiently explored; they are currently being re-examined. Duchamp's idea of the 'infrathin', an incalculably thin boundary separating/cojoining opposite qualities or substances and constituting an indeterminate realm of possibility, reflects Lander's concerns in art making.

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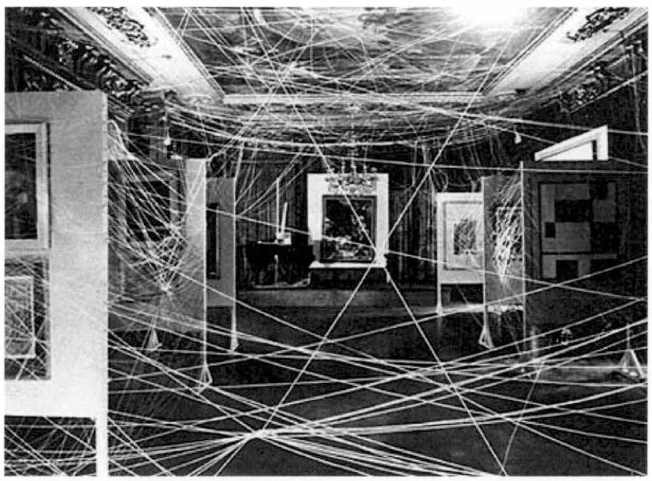
299 Maori baskets woven from flax.

300 Highfield, C. and Smith, P., *Pushing the Boundaries Eleven Contemporary Artists in Aotearoa New Zealand* Gilt Edge Publishing, Wellington, 2004, p. 42.

301 Nodelman, S., "Disguise and Display: Recent Publication Detail a Long-Neglected Aspect of Marcel Duchamp's Seminal Oeuvre- Installation Design as a Work of Art - Duchampiana I - Analysis -Critical Essay," *Art In America*,March, 2003.



John Schiff
Installation view of "First Papers"
1942, vintage gelatin silver print
7-5/8 x 10 inches.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Jacqueline, Paul and Peter Matisse in memory of their mother Alexina Duchamp.

Figure 60: Marcel Duchamp *Sixteen Miles of String* 1942[302]
Part of the installation for the *First papers of Surrealism* exhibition, New York

Digital String Games, (Figure 61) a work in collaboration with John Fairclough (English, arrived New Zealand 1990), is inspired by a traditional Maori string game about Tawhaki, an important figure in Maori mythology, and his journey to the heavens to bring back knowledge. It also references contemporary computer technology. As Lander says: "If you think about it, digital, it's something you play with string, your fingers and a language of computers, strings of binary code. The interplay of old and new".[303]

302 In *Sixteen Miles of a String* 1942, only one mile of string was used to transform the interior of New York's Whitlaw Reid mansion. The twine was woven into an intricate spider web of varying density and pattern from the ceiling thus impending and denying access of the visitor to the otherwise conventionally displayed works of art His installation materialised the web of external circumstances and attitudes which condition a viewer's reaction to a work of art. The gallery space is transformed into a sensorially disorienting space which disrupted the visitor's normal pattern of movement and behaviour.

303 "Strings Attached," *The Dominion* 2001.

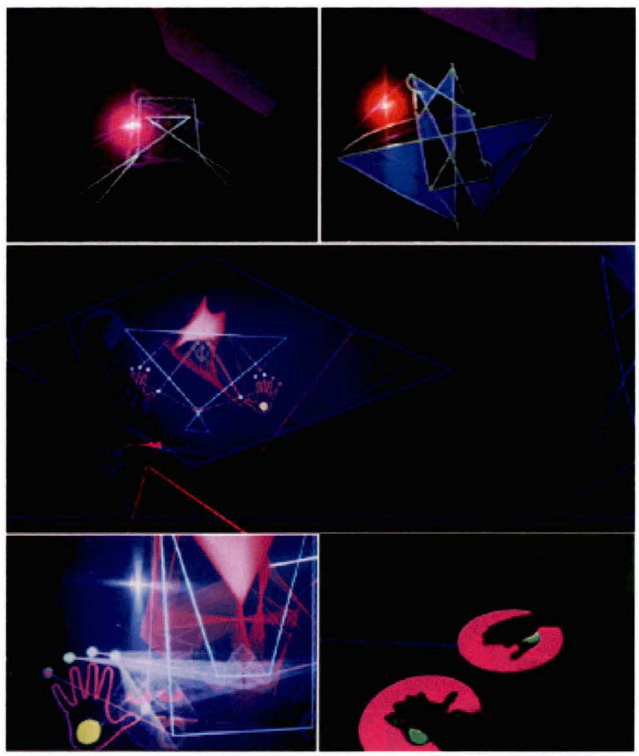


Figure 61: Maureen Lander and John Fairclough *Digital String Games* 1999-2000[304]

Traditional string games function as a mnemonic for the telling of mythic narratives. *Digital String Games III* uses 'string figure language' to tell a creation/destruction myth, about order arising from, and returning to, chaos. The work invites viewers to play a contemporary version of the string game, in order to explore the 'Froebel blocks'[305] of a latent language. Like traditional string games, the interactive component of the *Digital String Games* installation is a drawing system, which allows the viewer to influence events, but not dictate them.

> In the process of drawing a string figure, the viewer is implicated in a cyclical act of making and breaking connections between the virtual nodes of a network. But if the viewers' creations are to endure, the

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304 http://www.research.creative.auckland.ac.nz/?find=kdetail%20jfai012.www, accessed 26 June 2006.

305 Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel (1782 – 1852) was a German educationalist. In 1840 he created the word kindergarten for the Play and Activity Institute he had founded in 1837 at Bad Blankenburg for young children. One of his educational tools, (popularly known as Froebel Gifts or Fröbel Gaben) included geometric blocks that could be assembled in various combinations to form three dimensional compositions. http://www.google.com.au/search?hl=en&lr=&defl=en&q=define:froebel&sa=X&oi=glossary_definition&ct=title, accessed 26 June 2006.

symbiotic nature of creation and destruction must be understood, so that the systemic forces of entropy may be subverted.[306]

Through the exploration of the interface between different cultures using old and new technologies, Lander uncovers an indeterminate realm of possibility. For her, the space between different belief systems and world views enables enriched discourse.

The last three artists to be discussed (Montien Boonma, Chen Zhen and Ian Bonde) are influenced by Buddhism. In contrast to Hastings-McFall's critique of Christianity, Boonma (1953-2000, Thai) celebrates Buddhism. Boonma's devotional work reflects his commitment not only to his religion, but to the role of the artist in society. His engagement with the West is negotiated through a distinctly Buddhist and Thai approach. Brian Mertens says of Boonma's magisterial installations:

In Montien's work, you see a kindness and a willingness to share with others. He was on a quest for the Inner Self, and he put this quest on display for other people to witness, so they could realise it for themselves. Most of his work invites the viewer to have a personal experience with art, with Buddhist belief, with introspection.[307]

The work, *House of Hope*, is composed of thousands of strands of Buddhist prayer beads made of herbal medicines which cascade over a platform (Figure 62). The platform, in turn, is surrounded by painted images simulating temple stains from candle and smoke. These soft focus images suggest an intangible world as do the spicy fragrances[308] of the prayer beads. For Boonma, "Medicinal herbs represent one's hope to reach somewhere or something that exists....It is all about possibilities and acceptance."[309] Boonma made *House of Hope* as an elegy and a dedication to his wife who died of cancer. The work is

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306 www.pica.org.au/art01/cyb-AniArt.html, accessed 26 June 2006.

307 Mertens, B., "Death in Venice: Montien and Abaya," *Art Asia Pacific* 45, Summer, 2005.

308 The beads are made of saffron, ginger, eucalyptus and other herbs and spices mixed with rice paste.

309 Poshyananda, A., *Montien Boonma Temple of the Mind* The Asia Society, New York, 2003, p. 112.

a kind of prayer, an act of faith despite the failure of prior offerings. The downward cascading bead strands suggest weeping and add to the sense of loss and grief. The viewer is encouraged to go inside the sculpture by ascending the stairs to the platform into the beads. The house, made from the hanging beads, envelop the viewer and create a consoling, comforting and healing atmosphere. The beaded house is not concrete, and for Boonma, it is a metaphor for hope, something that is impossible to grasp physically. The work encourages interaction with the viewer so that meditation and contemplation, hope and healing may ensue.

Figure 62: Montien Boonma *House of Hope* 1996-97[310]
Installation; beads of medicinal herbs, stairs, mural, dimensions unknown

This work reflects all of the recurring themes of traditional 'stringed things'. It is about belief and identity. The Buddhist prayer beads have encoded meanings. There is meaning in making the beads of medicinal herbs for the artist and those who experience the installation. The senses are engaged so that the experience is encompassing. The installation strives for hope and healing.

Boonma chooses simple materials to illustrate, that through creativity, it is possible to solve problems without expensive materials and processes, not only in art but also in life. He is not advocating a return to the 'primitive', away from modernism, but rather the rethinking of the content of original materials,

310 Heartney, E., "Parallel Lives Montien Boonma at the Asia Society and Chen Zhen at P.S.1," *Art Asia Pacific* 38, Fall, 2000, p. 52.

ancestral knowledge and values. For him, art is not an end in itself, but a way of inspiring people to re-examine their situation in order to meet present day challenges.[311]

As an artist, he is conscious of his status in relation to the religious, cultural, social, and economic conditions which form his aesthetic. He says:

> In Thailand, contemporary art has not yet been accepted on a wide scale. Expensive imported materials are usually needed to create art work, and, unfortunately, not all artists can afford them. Thus, not all of them are able to work regularly and continuously, which hinders their development and their artistic creative output and also restricts the form of their work. To overcome this limitation, I avoid using the expensive and traditionally used art media such as oil paints, acrylic paints, and canvas in my work.
>
> Instead, I look for materials and objects in my rural surroundings; materials such as earth, sand, charcoal, baked clay, ash, and wax. These materials are in my affordable range. Not only do they help me carry on with my work; their characteristics are also in harmony with the way of life in the countryside. I use local materials and objects from the countryside to "manifest" their "reality in existence phenomena". Such phenomena are related to, and are an embedded physical and symbolic aspect of Thai society.
>
> As implied, materials and objects act as stimulants. They inspire me with means and ideas to create works of art. In addition, the previous experiences of the viewers help to enliven the imagination and thus create a perception of the work specific to each person. This is my intention.[312]

The two other artists, Zhen and Bonde, reference Buddhism in their work and juxtapose secular and sacred metaphors. Chen Zhen (1955-2003, Chinese working in France) uses culturally significant material to explore the possibility

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311 http://www.rama9art.org/montien/index.html 24 Dec 2005.

312 Montine Boonma, August 1991 http://www.rama9art.org/montien/solo.html 24 Dec 2005.

of new insights or perspectives. Like Maureen Lander, he is optimistic about possibilities not previously available. Zhen, an immigrant from China to Paris, references the Buddhist belief system and traditional Chinese philosophy from several perspectives, from within and from outside. He examines them through the lens of Western materialism and contemporary Chinese government's official cultural ideology. His work reflects cross-cultural social dynamics, through his absorption of different cultures, social contexts and aesthetic approaches in an ever-increasing globalised world.[313] He uses Chinese themes and materials in his installations to address a concept he refers to as 'transexperience', a way of explaining the complex life experiences of leaving one's native place and the resultant 'in-betweeness'. This state of dislocation, both an individual and social condition, is the result of blurred borders through the force of globalisation.[314] This condition, for Zhen, is a creative catalyst. His work reflects Papastergiadis[315] principle of 'turbulence' discussed in the previous chapter.

Figure 63: Chen Zhen *Crystal Ball* 1999[316]
Glass globe, saline liquid, abacus and prayer beads, wooden framework; dimensions unknown

Zhen's *'Crystal Ball'* 1999 is an elaborate womb-shaped structure of alternating strings of Buddhist prayer beads and wooden abacus balls which

313 Sandretta, R. et al, *Chen Zhen a Tribute*, 2003.
Available: http://www.ps1.org/cut/press/zhen.html, 21/04 2006.
314 Chiu, M., "Chen Zhen," *Art Asia Pacific* 37, Special issue, 2003, p. 33.
315 Papastergiadis, N., 2002, op cit, pp. 79-86.
316 Heartney, E. 2000, op cit, p. 51.

enclose a glass globe filled with four litres of saline liquid (Figure 63). The sacred and the secular beads, Buddhist and abacus, echo the manner in which official court beads were handled like worry beads and used as abacuses for business calculations during the period of Manchurian rule in China (1644-1912). These mandarin chains, worn by the emperor and the nobility, officials, army officers, wives and children, were status symbols influenced by the Tibetan rosary, *trengwa.*[317]

The saline-filled globe behaves as an inverted fish-eye, reflecting the surrounding room, and in so doing, includes the viewer. A different view is provided when one walks around the work. It is not possible for the viewer to focus on the beads, the globe and the inverted image reflected in the globe with a single glance. There is a need to have several perspectives to view the work. The vessel's miniaturised upside down world of the inversion reflects Zhen's 'transexperience' and the possibility of perspectival change as a result of 'in-betweeness'. Zhen's work invites discourse. His work is about new encoded meanings, about celebrating opportunities for new discourse, and about creating new parameters. He is stimulated by the rhizomous interconnectedness that transexperience offers.[318]

Bonde, a white Western artist, is engaged with Buddhism. In the work, *Node*, he blends concepts of the sacred and the secular (Figure 644). *Node* is made of three fibreglass spheres of different diameters (50, 61 and 86 cm) and different leaf surfaces (gold coloured schlagmetal, silver looking aluminium and copper). These spheres are attached to niches near a corner of a natural cleft in the rock face found along the Hobart Rivulet track.

The sphere forms have sacred and secular meaning. Like Hastings-McFall who deconstructed the lei, removing the flowers from the string, to metaphorically allude to paradise, stained glass windows and the Pacific, so too does Bonde unstring Buddhist beads from the prayer strand. The spheres read both as individual prayer beads or medals used to indicate athletic success. Primary

317 Dubin, L. S., 1995, op cit, p. 57.
318 Heartney, E., 2000, op cit.

meanings about spiritual attainment, sourced from Buddhist philosophy, are meshed with secular meanings about physical attainment.

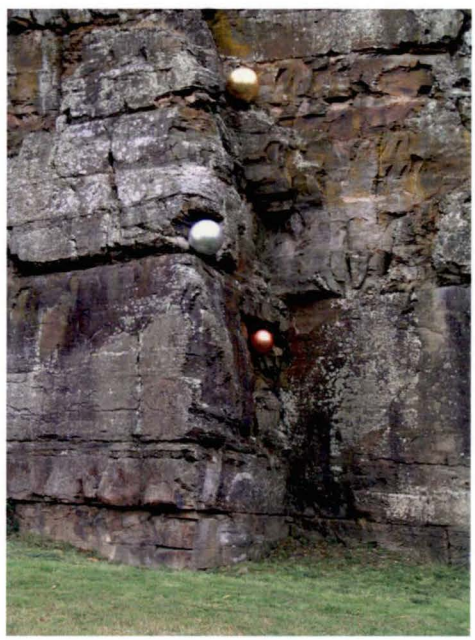

Figure 64: Ian Bonde *Node* 2004[319]
Installation, Biennial Hobart Mountain Festival
Three fibreglass spheres of different diameters (50, 61 and 86 cm)

The selected metallic colours have multiple associations, as astrological symbols (copper for Venus, silver for the Moon and gold for the Sun), as sporting symbols for stages of achievement, as markers in Buddhist development of the soul along the path to enlightenment, or as symbols for alchemical searches to convert base metals into precious ones. The metals have strong spiritual associations. Tibetan Buddhist prayer beads, made of these precious metals, are used to count mantras intended to increase life span, knowledge and merit. The alchemist's goal was spiritual as well as material. The elimination of the "base" material of the self permits the 'transmutation of the soul' in order to achieve the 'gold' of enlightenment through a journey of spiritual purification. Human intervention in extracting precious metals from the environment is echoed by the incursion of the spheres in the natural landscape. Bonde encourages the viewer to question "What is precious?"

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319 Image courtesy of Ian Bonde; the sculpture was made as a part of the 'Sculpture Trail' for the Biennial Hobart Mountain Festival, 2004.

The placement of the work in the landscape is highly considered as is the selection of shapes, sizes and surfaces. The landscape strengthens the metaphors and meanings in relation to the natural and the constructed. He uses historical references and contemporary processes to obtain these multi-levelled interpretations. For Bonde, the positioning of the spheres suggests an upward path, a possible route for anyone wanting to physically climb the cliff face, but is also a metaphor for transmogrification and betterment within the struggle for existence. The spheres precariously remain in situ, defying gravity; they suggest the difficulty of achieving balance as well as the difficulty of achieving physical and spiritual ascendance.

Human constructs are positioned next to nature's weathered surfaces. The regular form of the spheres and their glossy, shiny, metallic surfaces emphasise and enhance the contrast of the chaotic rock face and its dull, dry and mottled grey surface. Nature's forces, weather, temperature, light and changing sky, alter the surfaces and the reading of the work. The constructed sphere form contrasts with the jagged rough natural setting. The significance of the mathematical golden mean is pitted against the dynamic mystery of nature. The proportion of the spheres fit within the Fibonacci progression, a relationship used to describe recognisable forms and patterns of growth in nature, such as the spiral progression of a Nautilus shell. Bonde regards this principle as a human construct that inadequately describes nature.

The process of making is also of importance to Bonde. Concepts of proportion and balance are reflected in the choice of varying metal leaf sheet sizes in relation to sphere size in order to achieve appropriateness of the pattern scale to sphere scale. The gentle activity of laying the leaf is a contemplative activity which demands a calm but intense focus in order to obtain the correct alignment of the sheets. The manner of making reflects the manner of viewing. The work gently asks the viewer to question the way they live.[320]

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320 Ian Bonde's Draft Exegesis, Chapter 3, University of Tasmania 2005.

Trends

Contemporary art echoes the recurring themes which emerged in traditional 'stringed things', particularly that of identity. 'In-betweeness' resonates throughout all the works discussed in this chapter, in terms of artists' cultural heritage, cross-cultural contact and blended art-craft forms. There is a strong use of 'discursive aesthetics' to negotiate cross-cultural positions in a dynamic art world. The institutional structure within which cross-cultural exchange occurs has a significant bearing on the type of art produced. The work reflects entangled histories and illustrates the negotiation required by artists in relation to their identity; the gallery is a powerful agent in this negotiation.

Stereotypes, beliefs and historical interferences are deconstructed so that they can be reconstructed to demonstrate new insights. Sometimes this situation is regarded positively, with the possibility of new insights, sometimes negatively, in relation to the loss of knowledge and ways of living. The issue of identity is complex and this complexity is reflected in the search and struggle associated with defining it. Complexity finds its representation in hybrid works that reference both the colonising and colonised cultures.

The work can be viewed aesthetically but overlooking the narrative or discourse denies its full appreciation. Like the disregard or lack of understanding accorded the traditional 'stringed things', contemporary work also suffers because encoded meanings are overlooked. The difficulty for the viewer is that these encoded meanings may not be immediately apparent. Interpretation is dependent on many contextual factors including the level of understanding and the acuteness in looking.

Tekela-Smith uses autoethnography as a way of encouraging audiences to re-examine stereotypes. The colonised 'autoethnographic' images return the coloniser's gaze and demand that former narratives be read from different perspectives. Hastings-McFall's work acknowledges the social consequences of migration and integration. She, like Zhen, views 'in-betweeness' as a positive thing. She says: "It's a really free way to be, ...being in between,

where you're not one and not the other and you're never going to belong anywhere, fully, properly. I have a personal interest in exploring the concept of ethnic hybridity."[321,322] She weaves the strands of her past, historically and genealogically, to construct a stable base by which to navigate the future. The rediscovery and reinterpretation of traditional 'stringed things' has led her to a new sense of identity.

Narrative changes into discussion and critique. Critique sometimes comes close to blasphemy and sacrilege as in Hastings-McFall's use of the crucifix and hymn books. If there is offence in the use of the sacred, then it may reveal the source of meaning in cultures. If one cannot be offended then nothing may matter enough. There is a fine balance between blasphemy and critique which results in new insight. Hastings-McFall treads that line. The work cannot be separated from personal and cultural experiences.

Maureen Lander's exploration of the space between cultures echoes Duchamp's concept of the 'infrathin'. Her work is constructed of traditional and contemporary materials to extend her parameters of knowledge and to regain her Maori heritage. New meanings are encoded into traditional structures. She welcomes the new insights that the place between cultures might reveal and is positive about possibilities of new understandings.

Some belief systems, such as Buddhism and indigenous cosmological views, are celebrated more than others. This positive response may be because these systems are regarded as integrated, relational and have not been associated with colonisation. Christianity is strongly critiqued for its destructive influence on others' belief systems, for the loss of rituals, objects and associated information of the supplanted systems. There is a silence, a lack of response, in relation to some belief systems such as Hinduism, Judaism and Islamism. Secrecy, inaccessibility, lack of interest or knowledge about those systems, or complexity of the systems may account for part of the silence. A threatening

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321 *Island Crossings Contemporary Maori & Pacific Art from Aotearoa New Zealand* Global Arts Link, Ipswich, Queensland, 2000.

322 Gardiner, S., "The Sanctuary and the Garden," *Australian Art Review*, 3, 2004.

posture also discourages comment as has been witnessed by recent responses to the cartoon depiction of the prophet Mohammed.[323] Some belief systems are more open to debate and critical examination. Respect for the sacred could deter comment, not wanting to bring the sacred into a secular gallery setting. Silence can also be a way of responding and conferring meaning. Non-utterance could indicate that the 'holy' or the 'sacred' is near and that a boundary is being reached. Art may be regarded by some as a worldly activity in which religion does not have a place.

The parameters of the study limited the selected works to those using 'string' in the broad sense of the word. The material is not monumental; it tends to be non-precious, be it culturally significant or culturally neutral. This non-preciousness plays out narratives in relation to disposable contemporary culture and demonstrates that creativity need not be dependent on expensive materials. Paradoxically, display in a gallery context makes the end-result precious.

Contemporary work reflects several approaches in relation to strived-for outcomes. Sometimes desired outcomes of transformation are achieved through making and participating in the work; sometimes through critique of the perception of transformation or paradise. The 'work' process often has spiritual and socio-political overtones, as does the use of repetition and reiteration. Some processes (plaiting, twining) reflect the value, or lack thereof, of work associated with marginal groups, usually women. The ritual of making art can become a spiritual exercise. Painstaking and repetitive processes are sometimes used to reach a state of transcendence. Reiteration and repetition suggest movement and mantras, evocative of rituals surrounding traditional stringed things and may reflect larger rhythms. As New Zealand artist, Chris Charteris says: "There is a certain satisfaction exploring rhythm when doing repetitious work. No matter where you live in the world we all work to universal rhythms."[324] This state of transcendence is achievable by both artist and viewer. For the artist, it may be in the process of making; for the viewer, it may be in the act of viewing or the process of participation or interacting with the

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323 "The Cost of Free Speech," *The Mercury* 4 Feb. 2006.

324 Charteris cited in www.fingers.co.nz/south_project_04.htm, accessed 10 Oct 2005.

work. Artists may seek transformation of or reconnection with community. Jones, for example, addresses the importance of connectedness and community for urban Aboriginals.

Contemporary artists continue to reference traditional materials, forms and concepts in their response to cross-cultural issues, and to express systems of belief and identity. New materials and technologies are sometimes introduced. Increased scale alters wearable objects from body adornments into emblematic sculptures, installations and/or reactive environments. Work that cannot be used in the accustomed way acquires new status, as in Hastings-McFall's rosaries and Gough's 'bigger-than-me' necklaces. This nonutility reflects the invasion of art into craft territory. These shifts and changes from craft to art reflect conceptual transformation in regard to the objects, the different vision of the artists, the differentiated status of artists as compared to craftspersons and the influence of galleries.[325]

Exhibition method is critical to the new meanings and readings. The power of the gallery influences artists to shift from 'wearable' stringed things to object based work and installations. Despite the artist's awareness of the power of symbols, they feel the force of misunderstanding and dismissal. For instance, Hastings-McFall feels that, compared to the response given to her body adornment pieces, her 2-D and 3-D work and its meaning is taken more seriously when exhibited in a gallery space. She says:

> ...a lot of people tend to look on jewellery as frivolous and just decoration and don't realise that you've given it a lot of meaning in the forms. I'd been exhibiting jewellery in art galleries for quite a while, but once I got out of jewellery, you got a different audience. The whole thing [jewellery] was restrictive in so many ways basically and it meant that I could get out of the jewellery shops and into the art galleries. I'd just got to the stage where I'd investigated and made enough work about Pacific body adornment and I came to the end of the road for me anyway in terms of making any more work about it. There was work

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325 Becker, H. S., *Art Worlds* University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, pp. 272-299.

> that I wanted to make that talked about those issues, but kind of moving on a bit, because I was still researching and reading quite a lot and the jewellery form itself just wasn't the right vehicle. I started making assemblage work and, you can see that this has come directly from the lei, but the form has completely changed and that's just opened up a whole world.[326]

Hastings-McFall's move to 2-D representation is also reflected in Tekela-Smith's photographic renditions of her body adornment pieces. She denies that she has moved away from body adornment saying: "-- it's about what I make with my hands, which is the jewellery. So I can't ever move away from that."[327] However, the photographs recontextualise the body adornment pieces to create new references and visions.

The gallery provides a framework that encourages the search for meaning. Traditional 'stringed things' previously overlooked as art expressions are now being re-evaluated and their status as 'art' proclaimed by their exhibition in the gallery context. Traditional indigenous objects such as fish-traps, no longer used for their original purposes, have become indicators of cultures and identity. The colonised are breaking the ethnographic mold in which their art expression had been previously placed.

Today, the gallery context is all important to the recognition of the value of these objects. It plays a significant role in raising awareness of the symbolic or metaphorical content of contemporary expression. The gallery environment reduces the interference of extraneous sensory noise and therefore heightens the response to the object. Artists see the gallery both negatively and positively. Some see the gallery as a controlling force in the market, commodifying art and reducing the roles of meaning and critique. Some see galleries as encouraging hierarchies of expression, where body adornments and their encoded meanings are not always taken as seriously as the high arts. Others see the gallery as a place where meaning and critique are more likely to

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326 Mulford, T., *Interview with Niki Hastings-Mcfall, Artist* Te Atatu South, 2005.
327 Mulford, T., *Interview with Sofia Tekela-Smith, Artist* Greyland, Auckland, 2005.

occur; where the audience is encouraged to question parameters of what is looked upon, something which would not necessarily occur outside that context. Despite the different points-of-view, the gallery can be a sanctuary, a place where people agree to disagree, where difficult critical questions can be addressed, where reconciliation can occur for a moment, where negotiation is possible. It is the place where critique, sometimes regarded as blasphemy or sacrilege outside the gallery environment, can result in new insights.

Conclusion

The primary question of this study has been:
"How do contemporary artists reference traditional 'stringed things' of belief?"

Ironically, although the Islamic prayer strand was one of the spurs for this study, no contemporary art references were discovered in relation to it. It was found that the contemporary artists, who reference traditional 'stringed things', are primarily from the Third World, of indigenous or of mixed race heritage. Traditionally, string was a metaphor for 'connectedness', reflecting the ties that bound a community together. In the contemporary context, it has become a way of expressing links and negotiations of identity across cultures.

The strongest defining characteristic of contemporary reference is 'in-betweeness'. It resonates throughout. Many of the artists find themselves in-between cultures and histories; many of the forms are cross-overs between art and craft. This 'in-betweeness' is a dynamic condition where there is interplay and cross-overs between individuals, generations, and histories and where there is connectedness across physical, intellectual and artistic space.

A series of recurring themes was identified through the comparison of traditional 'stringed things' from different cultures to provide a lens through which to examine contemporary art. These themes include: belief, identity, encoded meanings, mnemonic role, meaning in making/using and strived for outcomes. A crucial finding was that difficulties associated with the study of traditional objects, such as inaccessibility and historical bias, loss and silence, motivate contemporary art response.

Other factors that influence response to traditional 'stringed things' are issues in relation to cross-cultural contact, such as the search for the spiritual, the romanticisation of the 'primitive', cultural imperialism, appropriation, and the power of agencies (galleries and market place). The art of both the First and

Third Worlds has been affected by cross-cultural contact. Boundaries have been blurred; cultural navigation and negotiation is required by artists. The West's gaze is being returned; historical perspectives and values are being re-examined.

The simplicity of structure and scale of traditional 'stringed things' often resulted in their symbolic and metaphorical significance being overlooked. As a consequence, most of the contemporary artists discussed in this thesis have scaled up the forms. They have less relational reference to the body and have become emblematic, sculptural or installational. Several have commented that their work is taken more seriously when it is in larger 2-D/3-D format.

The materials, be they traditional or modern, tend to be non-precious. Egalitarian non-precious materials extend the boundaries of 'art'. The choice of material is dictated by the philosophical outlook of the artist, the metaphorical meaning of culturally significant or culturally neutral material, and availability/cost factors.

Contemporary art draws upon the power of 'stringed things' to re-examine belief and its influences on identity. The secular and the sacred are often superimposed to create a tension that forces a re-examination of individual points-of-view and historical bias. Aesthetic appeal is only one element of contemporary response; the role of belief, ideas, encoded meaning, identity and critique is vital in decoding the work. The work is discursive. The strong appeal for serial order and modular repetition in the work suggests rhythm, mantra and ritual. Many artists emphasised the importance of repetitive and time-consuming making processes because they induced meditation.

The wide range of responses reflects the dynamics of contemporary life, the entangled histories of artists and their state of 'in-betweeness'. Borders have become porous; cross-cultural contact and globalisation have become increasingly influential. Some responses continue and extend original meanings. Some mourn the loss of their original belief systems because of historical interference. Some re-examine and re-contextualise the historical

attitudes and mindsets in relation to traditional 'stringed things'. Some are devotional; others are critical of belief systems. Others blend secular and the sacred to develop new perspectives. No contemporary responses to traditional 'stringed things' were found from Hindu, Islamic and Jewish traditions.

This study could be expanded in several directions, in relation to broader issues and particular objects. Broader questions and philosophical stances worthy of further study include the study of the impact of the art/craft hierarchy on 'stringed things' in contemporary art, and the study of silences in contemporary art response in relation to certain belief systems and how subtle non-spoken forces influence art expression. Respect for all religious and cosmological belief systems raises many difficult philosophical questions in relation to artistic expression. In the current environment of religious sensitivity, particularly towards Islam and Judaism, some of the questions to be considered, include: When does critique become offence? Can offensive art provide new insights? Are the rights of artists more important than any religious offence that might result? and Who has the right to hear, tell and bestow? In addition to these broader philosophical issues, there is a need for in-depth study of specific objects, such as amulets and Aboriginal stringed objects. There is some urgency for this research given the age of those in the community who have knowledge of these objects.

This study has found that there is a vivacious and optimistic engagement by artists of both the First and Third Worlds with reference to traditional 'stringed things' to comment on identity, belief systems and colonial heritage. The interface between different cultures is explored using old and new technologies. Traditional stereotypes are challenged. Artists examined in this thesis did not regard diverse positions as problematic; rather, they were seen as a point of departure where new insights and articulations could be obtained. The work is about new encoded meanings, about celebrating opportunities for discourse and about creating new parameters. Interaction was culturally affirming. Contemporary artists, who reference and reinterpret 'traditional stringed things', illustrate that enriched exchanges are possible across cultures.

Appendices

Appendix I: Contact list

Listed below are dates of meetings, interviews, contacts and reply emails detailing contact with curators, academics, members of bead societies and other persons with knowledge of the thesis area. Contacts are listed in alphabetical order according to surname. Contacts made via email to which there was no reply have not been listed.

Contact person	**Contact details**
Jenny Allen Collections Access Officer National Museum of Australia GPO Box 1901 Canberra ACT 2601 Ph: Fx: 02 6208 5299 j.allen@nma.gov.au	Email: 15 April 2004.
Kim Akerman Kim.akerman@ Hobart Indigenous material expert	Email: 26 Nov. 04; meeting: 7 Dec 2004.
Beads-L Member Websites: http://home.mira.net/~dzinn/MemberWebsites.htm	Regular emails with members of this group advising on beads and references and other sources of information.
Christopher Braddock Artist Associate professor Auckland University of Technology Central Auckland New Zealand Ph: W: H: M: Home: chris.braddock@	Email: 9,14,22 Nov 2005; Interview: 17 Nov 2005.
Heather Brooks Curatorial Administrative Assistant Art Gallery of South Australia E-mail: Brooks.Heather@saugov.sa.gov.au Ph: Fx: 8207 7070	Email: 1April 2004.

Tony Brown Curator of Indigenous Cultures Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Ph: Tony.Brown@tmag.tas.gov.au	Appointment: 5 April 2004; Phone: 28 April 2004; 17 May 2004; 27 May 2004.
Chartwell Trust Sue Gardiner Re contacts for Niki Hastings-McFall and Sophia Tekela-Smith <info@chartwell.org.nz	Email: 25 Sept 2005.
Chag-Tong Chen-Tong Buddhist Centre Hobart	Meeting: 28 July 2004.
David and Pnina Clark The Jewish Centre 93 Lord Street Sandy Bay 7005 Ph: jwc@southcom.com.au	Interview: 11 August 2004; Email: 24 Oct 2004.
Grace Cochrane Senior curator, Australian decorative arts and design Powerhouse Museum, Sydney Ph: Fx: 02-92170355 email: gracec@phm.gov.au	Email: 1 April 2004.
Barry Craig Curator of Foreign Ethnology South Australia Museum Craig.Barry@saugov.sa.gov.au	Email: 30 March 2004.
Brenda L Croft Senior Curator Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art National Gallery of Australia GPO Box 1150 Canberra ACT 2601 Ph: +61 Fx: +61 2 6240 6529 <Brenda.Croft@nga.gov.au> www.nga.gov.au	Email: 26 March 2004.

Murshid F. A. Ali Elsenossi Spiritual Director and Marriage Celebrant AlMiraj Sufi and Islamic Study Centre for Human Development To Being Hobart Ph: Fx: 6234 5254 www.almirajsuficentre.org.au gift of beads	Study meeting on the meaning of beads: 9 July 2004.
Phyllis Francis, wife of the late Peter Francis Jr Author of *Beads of the World* 2nd ed: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 1999. Centre of Bead Research, 4 Essex Street Lake Placid, New York 12946 USA	Reply Letter: Early March 2004.
Aunti Corrie Fullard Ph: Re traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal Shell necklaces exhibition at Bett Gallery Hobart No desire to speak about the necklaces	Phone 26 April 2004.
Janda Gooding Curator of Historical Art Art Gallery of Western Australia <JandaG@artgallery.wa.gov.au> Ph: Fx: 08 9492 6655	Email: 26 March 2004.
Dr Julie Gough Curator, Indigenous Art National Gallery of Victoria 180 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne, 3000 PO Box 7259 Melbourne Victoria 8004 Australia Ph: 03 Fx: 03 8620 2515 Email: julie.gough@ngv.vic.gov.au	Email: 29 March 2004; meeting: 10 April 2006.
Lola Greeno Program Officer Aboriginal Arts Arts Tasmania Level 1 Cornwall Square 12-16 St John Street PO Box 1186 Launceston Tas 7250 Ph: Fx: 6334 1131 M: Lola.Greeno@dtpha.tas.gov.au www.dtpha.tas.gov.au	Interview: 24 May 2004; Email: 20 Sept 2004.

Jamyang and Uli Gurung 12 Curtis Avenue South Hobart Ph: Buddhist practitioners	Email: 12 July 2004; interview 30 August 2004; corrections 26 Nov 2004; meeting: 10 Dec 2004.
Dr. Louise Hamby ARC Fellow Industry Centre for Cross-Cultural Research ANU WEH Stanner Building 037 Ph: <Louise.Hamby@anu.edu.au>	Email: 29 March 2004; telephone call March 2004.
Niki Hastings-McFall New Zealand Artist mkiizephyr@ 1 Valron Road Te Atatu Sth Ph:	Email: 28 September 2005; 12, 25, 28, 31 Oct 2005; 14 Nov 2005; interview; 17 Nov 2005.
Eve Hicks Transcriber @ $20.00/hr 317 Churchill Avenue Sandy Bay 7005 Ph:	July & September 2004.
Peter Hughes Curator of Decorative Arts Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery 40 Macquarie Street Hobart 7000 TASMANIA Australia Ph: 61 peter.hughes@tmag.tas,gov.au	Email: 26 Feb 2004 Examination of databases 4 May 2004.
Associate Professor Roberta Julian, PhD (Sociology) Director, Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies (TILES) University of Tasmania Private Bag 22 Hobart, 7001 Tasmania, AUSTRALIA Email: Roberta.Julian@utas.edu.au Ph: (03) Fx: (03) 6226 2864 INTERNATIONAL: Ph: +61 3 Fx: +61 3 6226 2864	Email: 20 May 2004.

David Kaus Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait program National Museum of Australia Canberra, ACT Email: d.kaus@nma.gov.au Ph:	Meeting: 13 Oct 2004; email: 9 Nov 2004, 8 Dec 2004.
Anna Kingston Adult Migrant English Service, TAFE Ph: Work Ph: Home Email kingstonians@ kingstona@tafe.tas.edu.au	Telephone 17 May 2004;Email: 18 May 2004; Meeting: 25 May 2004.
Ajak Mabia Student/singer c/o TAFE GPO Box 2015 Hobart Tas 7001 Ph: ajakmabia@	Interview: 25 May 2004.
Phillip Manning Manager of Australian Aboriginal Collections & Deputy Head of Collections South Australian Museum manning.phillip@saugov.sa.gov.au	Email: 6 March 2004.
Howard Morphy Centre for Cross-Cultural Research Old Canberra House Australian National University Canberra ACT 0200 <Howard.Morphy@anu.edu.au> Ph: home Fx: ANU CRICOS # 00120C http://www.anu.edu.au/culture The Fusion series of exhibitions and symposia in 2003 web address url is http://www.anu.edu.au/culture/n_activities/fusion/home.htm	Email: 18 Feb 2004.
New Zealand Galleries • John Leech • Gow Langsford • Fhe Galleries • Auckland Art Gallery • Auckland Museum	Visited between 17-20 Nov 2005.

Stephen O'Connor Bangarra Dance Company Unaipon, Choreographed by Frances Rings. Sydney July 2004 Jpeg photo by Greg Barrett. <stepheno@	Email: 23 July 2004.
Louise Palmer Access and Archives Officer Registration National Museum of Australia Email: l.palmer@nma.gov.au Ph: 02 Fx: 02 6208 5299	Email: 01 Oct 2004; meeting: 13 Oct 2004.
Ann Porteus Sidewalk Gallery 19-21 Castray Esplanade Battery Point Tasmanian 7004 ann@ Ph:	Meeting: 13 May 2004.
Rabia Reid AlMiraj Sufi and Islamic Study Centre for Human Development To Being 1st Floor 61A Liverpool St Hobart Ph: Fx: 6234 5254 www.almirajsuficentre.org.au	Email: 7 July 2004 personal discussion 9 July 2004.
Sofia Tekela-Smith New Zealand artist duskimaiden@ Ph: Guest #	Emails: 8, 21, 25,28 Oct 2005; 1, 14 Nov 2005; interview: 18 November 2005.
Liz Turner Curator of Invertebrate Zoology Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Ph: Member of the Aboriginal Shell necklace Sub-Committee of the Arts Tasmania Aboriginal Steering Committee Showed illustrations of shells and the possible difference between contemporary and older necklaces and advised me to talk to the makers	Appointment: 4 May 2004.

Ken Watson Assistant Curator Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art KenW@ag.nsw.gov.au	Email: 29 March 2004
Margie West Curator Aboriginal Art & Material Culture Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory GPO Box 4646 Darwin NT 0801 Ph: (08) Fx: (08) 89998289 M: Margie.West@nt.gov.au	Email: 13 Feb 2004;17 Feb 2004; 29 March 2004.
Deborah Zinn Member of Beads-L , Melbourne 1/33 McIlwrick Street Windsor, Victoria 3181 Ph: (03) M: dzinn@ _____	Regular emails; meeting: 29 Nov 2004:

Appendix II: Transcriptions of Interviews

(Bound in a separate volume)

1. Jamyang and Uli Gurung: Buddhist Prayer Strands South Hobart, 2004.
2. David and Pnina Clark: Strings in the Jewish Religion Sandy Bay, 2004.
3. Ajak Mabia: Beads as Used by a Refugee from Sudan Hobart, 2004.
4. Lola Greeno: Shell Necklaces Launceston, 2004.
5. Niki Hastings-Mcfall: Artist, Te Atatu South, 2005.
6. Sofia Tekela-Smith: Artist, Greyland, Auckland, 2005.
7. Chris Braddock: Artist, Auckland, 2005.

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